

# IRELAND

IN THE AGE OF  
REFORM AND REVOLUTION

*by the same author*

THE IRISH FREE STATE  
ITS GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS  
THE GOVERNMENT OF NORTHERN IRELAND  
A STUDY IN DEVOLUTION

# I R E L A N D

IN THE AGE OF  
REFORM AND REVOLUTION

*A Commentary on  
Anglo-Irish Relations and on  
Political Forces in Ireland  
1840-1921*

*by*

NICHOLAS MANSERGH

B L I T T , M A , D . P H I L .

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*My mind is upon Erin,  
Upon Loch Lene, upon Linny,  
Upon the land where the Ulstermen are,  
Upon gentle Munster and upon Meath*

COLUMCILLE, GREETING TO IRELAND  
TRANS. KUNO MEYER

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TO  
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## *Ireland in the Age of Reform and Revolution*

There is no need to emphasize the importance of the task. The Irish Question was the most significant problem in *politics* which confronted English democracy in the last century. It failed to provide a solution. Why? Was the question not in fact susceptible of a democratic solution? Or was it because Irish intransigence made a solution impossible? Or was it because English statesmanship was unimaginative? This book is written in the belief that a review of contemporary evidence, by enabling us to see in true perspective the growth and gradual development of those forces which were to prove dominant in moulding the future history of Ireland, affords the only approach to a realistic assessment of the merits and defects of English policy in Ireland. For the history of nineteenth-century Ireland is more than a prologue to the events of the twentieth and has a character all of its own which is often overlooked to-day.

Gibbon in his *Autobiography* confessed that he shrank in terror from the prospect of writing a history of England under the Stuarts because in such a history "every character is a problem, and every reader a friend or an enemy" and the author is supposed "to hoist the flag of party and is devoted to damnation by the adverse faction." The terrors which determined Gibbon to seek a more congenial field are, I am convinced, trivial in comparison with those terrors which await him who ventures into the field of modern Irish history. It is a field which, it may well be for this reason, has remained in many important respects unexplored territory and if I may not claim indulgence for courage, perhaps some allowance may be made for the difficulty of assessing evidence in a field where almost every utterance and every fact has been subjected to a controversial analysis. To obtain the wider view I have made very full use of the commentaries of European observers. They are far from being impartial, but by looking on Ireland's past as at once a part and an outcome of European history, they reveal her history in a new and distinctive light.

## *Introductory Note*

Finally, it should be remarked that this survey of Anglo-Irish relations in the last years of the Union is selective rather than complete. It is designed to throw new light on events and forces working in that period, by bringing into clear relief those things which appear to me to possess enduring historical importance. It is intended to provide an introductory analysis of political and economic forces in the period and I hope that this study which may perhaps claim to be at least in part, a pioneering work will encourage more exhaustive enquiries into the influence of social and economic factors upon the course of political events in the period under review.

My thanks are due to Professor George O'Brien, D.Litt., of University College, Dublin, for timely encouragement and advice, and to Mr. R. B. McCallum, Fellow of Pembroke College, Oxford, for an authoritative opinion on the second part of the book and for valuable suggestions which have been gratefully adopted. To Mr. G. D. Ramsay, Fellow of St. Edmund Hall, Oxford, whose meticulous scholarship was responsible for the elimination of many inaccuracies, I am also indebted for much stimulating and enlightening discussion on the comparative validity of the essentially political and the essentially economic interpretation of nineteenth-century Irish history. I must thank Miss Olive Armstrong, Lecturer in Political Science at Trinity College, Dublin, who has rendered me invaluable service by criticizing and commenting on the greater part of the book.

My greatest debt is to my wife who undertook the thankless task of preparing this book for the press and of revising the proofs.

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*May 1940*

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Martin Lawrence Ltd., have kindly given me permission to quote the extracts from *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Correspondence 1846-95* and from *Marx—Letters to Dr. Kugelmann* which appear in Chapter III. To Messrs. Macmillan I am indebted for permission to quote certain extracts from the late Mr. W. B. Yeats's *Collected Poems*, published in 1933, and from the same author's *Last Poems*, published in 1940.

M.M.

PART I

*Ireland Under the Union.*  
*The Opinion of Contemporary Observers*





## CHAPTER I

# *The State of Ireland in the Early Years of the Union*

"The most terrible thing is that there is nothing terrible."

TURGENEV

WHEN Queen Victoria ascended the throne England was already confronted with the consequences of the greatest failure in its history. The passing centuries had witnessed the attempts of Englishmen to conquer Ireland. The task that seemed more than half accomplished by the ruthless efficiency of the predatory barons, who owed allegiance to the great Angevin king, was all undone two centuries later when the feckless Richard of Bordeaux was trapped among the Wicklow Hills. It was resumed with force and finesse by the Tudors, who saw in Ireland at once a menace to their security and the outlet for the superabundant vitality of Renaissance England. A generation ambitious "to seek new worlds, for gold, for praise, for glory" was not reluctant to undertake the colonization of Ireland. The names of the Planters in Munster, of Spenser, of Grenville, of Raleigh, reflect the untarnished brilliance of an heroic age, but their achievement in this province was not equal to their reputation. And so in succeeding centuries the sombre tale of Plantation, of rebellion, of Cromwellian violence, of civil and religious war, of the penal Code mocked the illusion of a final Elizabethan settlement.

The English invasions of Ireland were unending because the conquest was never complete. And all the while through

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the long years of adversity, pressure from without was consolidating within a core of resistance to the invader which depended in the last resort, not upon destructible material forces but upon a slowly maturing and finally indestructible conviction that Ireland would and should be free. Resistance and rebellion were always unavailing, for a poverty-stricken and ill-disciplined people whose distaste for compromise left them disunited in every crisis could not hope successfully to challenge the limitless resources of an island power whose heritage was the dominion of the sea. Yet resistance continued and though always crushed, it was not without result. These sporadic rebellions were wasteful of lives that could ill be spared, but by such sacrifices alone could Ireland keep alive a tradition so vivid, so emotional, so fanatical as to withstand the miasma of failure and despair. As Napoleon had fanned to flame nationalism in conquered Germany and in Italy, so, too, the English rulers of Ireland having failed while yet there was time to conciliate a not-unfriendly people, were confronted at the last by an Irish ideal which, alien to their outlook yet fostered by their misrule, was to prove a source of strength more resilient because it was more single-minded than any which a great Imperial people could command.

At the accession of Queen Victoria the catastrophic climax of British rule in Ireland lay in the distant future, yet its coming was not hidden from the sight of the observant. Nassau William Senior, the first Professor of Political Economy at the University of Oxford, a man who possessed in a marked degree all the qualities frequently associated in the public mind with University teachers, lucidity, dryness, undue devotion to detail, lack of imagination, was none the less moved to write on a visit to Ireland in 1843 that "When Irish Questions or rather the *Irish Question* (for there is but one) has been forced on our attention we have felt, like a dreamer in a nightmare, oppressed by the consciousness that some great evil was rapidly advancing—that mere exertion on our part

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would avert it, but we had not the power to will that exertion.”<sup>1</sup> It was a significant commentary on the state of Ireland after some forty years’ experience of government under the Union.

To Irishmen the misrule of their country seemed due to the malignant will of its conquerors. The truth is quite different. It was due almost entirely to ignorance. “The principal cause of misgovernment, particularly of the misgovernment which irritates rather than injures,” wrote Nassau Senior, “is ignorance.” English people did not understand the feelings of Irishmen simply because there was no contact between the two peoples. “The great majority of each House of Parliament know less of Ireland,” remarked the same author, “than they know of Belgium and of Switzerland.”<sup>2</sup> And he added that the inhabitants of the North and South knew little of one another—as indeed they do to this day. Sir John Barrington observed that a visit to Ireland appealed to the ordinary Englishman’s sense of adventure since he knew as little of this country as he did of Kamchatka.

What was the cause of this ignorance of Irish problems and of the Irish outlook? It was certainly not from lack of official information. Between 1810 and 1833 Parliament appointed 114 commissions and 60 select committees to investigate Irish affairs, in addition to the long hours spent in debate in the House. But the accumulation of evidence of distress was in itself valueless. It afforded no more than the foundation on which to base the positive reforms which the state of Ireland so urgently demanded. An intimate personal knowledge of the country was essential both to inspire and to carry such a policy to success. But it was just this personal knowledge that was so unhappily absent. The reason was quite simply that very few people ever visited Ireland.

A Mr. Grant, who records his impressions of his travels to Ireland in 1844, writes with a revealing *naïveté* of the country

<sup>1</sup> *Journals, Conversations and Essays relating to Ireland*, vol. i, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 123.

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and its inhabitants. In his opinion the scarcity of English travellers was due to indifference or unwillingness and not to the difficulties of travel. On the contrary Her Majesty's Mail packets crossing from Liverpool to Kingstown were both cheap and comfortable. "The passage money is one pound which includes the usual half-crown to the steward," writes Mr. Grant, and he proceeds with enthusiasm, "a finer set of vessels than these government packets never quitted any English or any other port. They are of a large size fitted up in a style of comfort which calls forth the admiration of all who travel by them. But their greatest recommendation is their sailing capabilities. Not only do they perform the voyage in eleven or twelve hours, but they sail so steadily that in ordinary weather persons seldom experience sea-sickness in performing the voyage."

In Ireland itself Mr. Grant was agreeably surprised by the travelling facilities and the moderation of the charges—but then he was certainly an accommodating visitor. The Dublin to Drogheda railway was at this time the only railway of any length, so Mr. Grant for the most part travelled by coach at a speed averaging nine miles an hour. His only complaint was the number and importunity of the beggars who crowded around the coach. The immense number of mendicants gave a vivid impression of Irish poverty and at first "the circumstance of so many fellow creatures importunately soliciting charity from you is far from agreeable: but as you proceed on your journey, the novelty wears away and you feel less disturbed by their appearance and importunities." At the end Mr. Grant could not resist the suspicion that many of the "Irish mendicants are actually in love with their rags and that to put them in a suit of new clothes would be to render them altogether miserable."<sup>1</sup> An American citizen, Mr. Andrew

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from James Grant's *Ireland and the Irish*, vol. ii. Published Anon. This description should be compared with that of Arthur Young written half a century earlier: "Before I conclude with Dublin," wrote Young, "I shall only remark that walking in the streets there, from the

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Bigelow, who visited Ireland some years earlier declared, "that nothing short of actual vision" could convey to an American a just conception of the apparent misery of this class of people in Ireland. In Dublin mendicants swarm the street in every direction and assail the passenger with an importunity that cannot, or will not, be repulsed. "Families," he said, were "literally strewn along the street clothed with garments which gave one the first distinct notion of tatters."

But Mr. Grant, a man of easy temperament and kindly disposition, looked on Ireland with the interested, unprejudiced but superficial gaze of a traveller who is determined to record everything he sees in a foreign land. His approach and therefore his impressions were in many respects far removed from that of the majority of his countrymen. The inducements to visit Ireland seemed to them quite incommensurate with the trouble involved. Disraeli never visited Ireland and Gladstone, who devoted the last twenty years of his life to the problems of Ireland, visited the country but once, and then only for a few days. These facts would be incredible if they were not true<sup>1</sup> and one can but reflect uneasily on the magnitude of the consequences that may be attributed to so slight a cause. English ignorance of Ireland remained and as Nassau Senior surmised "does not seem likely to diminish." "Ireland," he wrote in 1844, "is not on the road to any other place: and the greater part of it at present is not an inviting country to travel in. There are scarcely any railroads—the climate is wet and ungenial—the inns are generally bad—the greater part of the inland scenery is uninteresting and almost all the moral objects are painful. Until it has been greatly altered, nothing will make it frequented by those who belong to happier countries."<sup>2</sup> So the rulers of Ireland never visited narrowness and populousness of the principal thoroughfares as well as from the dirt and wretchedness of the *canaille*, is a most disgusting and uneasy experience."

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Buckle, *Life of Disraeli*, vol. ii, pp. 6 and 7.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., vol. i, p. 123.

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it, never saw its miseries, never experienced the people's sense of injustice nor comprehended their resentment against remedies concocted by those who had no first-hand knowledge of the disease.

The country which Nassau Senior describes with cold academic detachment was unhappy. It was not so much that the people were desperately poor, though indeed the majority lived close to the starvation line, as that remedy and reform seemed hopeless. What oppressed Nassau Senior most profoundly was the feeling "that there were means by which the existing misery might be relieved and the approaching dangers averted: but that the prejudices and passions of England and Scotland rendered it useless to suggest because it made it impossible to apply them." Such indeed were the bitter fruits of ignorance.

The poverty of Ireland in the middle years of the nineteenth century shocked all who saw it—Nassau Senior, the ebullient Mr. Grant, Count Cavour, Engels and Gustave de Beaumont alike. The last, a French aristocrat who had explored the "virgin forests" of America with Alexis de Tocqueville in search of the "splendid savages" with which Rousseau's romantic pen had peopled them, described the Ireland of 1844 with a vividness that still strikes a chill of horror to the heart. M. de Beaumont's romanticism finds an outlet in an opening reminiscent of the challenging aphorism with which Rousseau had prepared his readers for the political doctrine of the "Contrat Social."

"L'Irlande," wrote de Beaumont,<sup>1</sup> "par un destin fatal, est jetée sur l'océan auprès de l'Angleterre, à qui elle semble enchaînée par les mêmes liens qui unissent l'esclave au maître."

But for the rest his comments on Irish life are sober, illuminating, at times profound and at times too, coloured by anglophobia. What affected M. de Beaumont most was the

<sup>1</sup> *L'Irlande Sociale, Politique et Religieuse*. First published 1839. Later, revised edition, 1863.

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poverty that was apparent wherever he travelled, save only in Ulster. The country itself, despite its beauty and the richness of its soil, seemed impoverished because of continuous mist and rain blowing across from the Atlantic. It was the victim of its climate; and while "ces montagnes élégantes, ces grands lacs, ces prairies éternelles, ces collines aussi fraîches que les vallées," delighted the traveller with their beauty in the bright sunlight, M. de Beaumont saw them nearly always half hidden under leaden skies. The countryside, too, in most parts, having been despoiled of trees, was bleak and so on a spring day it failed to give that impression of renewed vitality for which the traveller had looked.<sup>1</sup>

But if a countryside whose charm eludes those who do not know and love it well depressed this French aristocrat whose home was among the sunlit, smiling valleys of the Loire, it aroused in him emotions in full accord with those prompted by the sight of the condition of the people themselves. "I have seen the Indian in his forests and the negro in his irons," wrote M. de Beaumont, "and I believed, in pitying their plight, that I saw the lowest ebb of human misery; but I did not then know the degree of poverty to be found in Ireland. Like the Indian, the Irishman is poor and naked; but he lives in the midst of a society which enjoys luxury and honours wealth. The Indian retains a certain independence which has its attraction and a dignity of its own. Poverty-stricken and hungry he may be, but he is free in his forests; and the feeling that he enjoys this liberty blunts the edge of his sufferings. But the Irishman undergoes the same deprivations without enjoying the same liberty, he is subjected to regulations: he dies of hunger. He is governed by laws; a sad condition which combines the vices of civilization with those of primitive life. To-day the Irishman enjoys neither the freedom of the savage nor the bread of servitude."<sup>2</sup> The language of yesterday rarely carries conviction to the men of to-day and M. de Beaumont's

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 190-5.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., vol. i, pp. 222-4.

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description would fill the readers with distrust of its accuracy, if only because of the but half-dissipated illusions on the happiness of the "splendid savage" so dear to the Romantics, so seductive to all French travellers in the New World from the Marquis de Lafayette to Alexis de Tocqueville, were it not that the evidence as to the dreadful poverty of Ireland at this time is irrefutable. Nassau Senior described "a population more unhappy in itself, and the cause of more unhappiness to all who have to deal with it, than any other civilized and free community in existence,"<sup>1</sup> whilst the Report of the Commission appointed in 1843 by Peel to enquire into Irish agrarian problems with Lord Devon as Chairman remarked upon the "patient endurance" with which "the Irish poor met sufferings greater, we believe than the people of any other country in Europe have to sustain."<sup>2</sup>

M. de Beaumont, who saw for himself the ravages of famine in Connaught in 1835 and 1837 considered that the wretched condition of the Irish people could scarcely be compared with that of any other country. Elsewhere one may see some, even a majority of the population, destitute but nowhere else was there to be found a whole nation of poor. To understand the social state of such a country it was necessary to recall only "*ses misères et ses souffrances; l'histoire des pauvres est celle de l'Irlande.*" In order to appreciate the measure of Irish poverty all preconceived ideas as to the distinction between rich and poor must be put aside. In other countries only those who were unemployed or who begged were considered poor, but in Ireland farm labourers and even small farmers suffered a degree of poverty such as was almost unknown in England. And the wretchedness of the Irish people did not lessen with time; it was permanent because its cause was permanent, and famine, its most dread manifestation, constituted a recurrent climax.

The Irish countryside affords an eternal contrast between

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., vol. i, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> 1845, xix, p. 12.



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wealth and poverty. The rich grass lands of Meath give way to the barren beauty of the west, the Golden Vale where feed the cattle for which Ireland is famed the world over, and the wide plains of Tipperary are bounded on the north by hills and bog, by the Galtee mountains on the south, while out to the west lies the windswept rocky soil of the County Clare. M. de Beaumont looking out over the Lakes of Killarney from Muckross Abbey saw on the one side uncultivated fields, marshy wastes studded with patches of heather, with here and there a stunted fir tree, and on the other at the foot of the range of mountains where lay the lovely Lakes of Killarney, rich and smiling fields, woods of an almost tropical vegetation, a countryside at once fertile and extraordinarily beautiful. And he felt that the contrast between great wealth and abject poverty presented there reflected a distinction characteristic of Ireland, not only of its countryside but also of the people who dwelt in it. The contrasts of nature were equalled by the contrast in the state of man. "In Ireland the traveller," writes M. de Beaumont, "sees magnificent castles and wretched cabins: but no house which stands midway between the palaces of the great and the hovels of the indigent, for in this country there are only rich and poor."<sup>1</sup>

The division between wealth and poverty, which has disappeared from the Ireland of to-day where the gulf which divides the rich from the poor is as narrow as in the Scandinavian States, was the outcome of a process, which had acquired momentum through the centuries, and by which rich and poor pursued their separate ways, the one leading to great wealth, the other to abject poverty. As the wealth of the one class increased, so the resources of the other diminished till at last in the middle years of the nineteenth century M. de Beaumont contrasted an aristocracy living in great luxury, with the majority of the people living in the lowest depth of poverty.

The epigrammatic distinctions in which de Beaumont

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., vol. i, p. 198.

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delights suggest a state in which the divisions were more rigid and the contrasts more marked than was in fact the case. When he writes that the incomes of landowners sometimes reached sums "dont l'énormité nous paraît presque chimérique," when he describes the magnificent clothing of the rich in this impoverished island, their splendid castles, their huge demesnes, their mountains and fields, their woods and lakes and notes how the luxury of their life and the ostentation of their wealth stand out against the misery of the people, he allows sentiment to influence his judgment. The condition of Ireland was deplorable, the contrast between wealth and poverty unparadonable, yet none the less it is also true that the wealth of the Anglo-Irish landlords was easily surpassed by that of the plutocrats in other countries,<sup>1</sup> that the magnificence of their country houses, which were in all too many instances ill-designed, straggling buildings composed in large part of "wings" added at different periods and frequently of incongruous architecture, could not bear comparison with the "stately homes" of England, and still less with the Châteaux of the Loire. The "luxury," too, of the lives of the Anglo-Irish landlords is frequently exaggerated. If abundance of food and wine—unfortunately Father Mathew's Temperance movement had few adherents among the ruling classes—be accounted luxury then the indictment is valid, but if by luxury is to be understood not somewhat primitive pleasures but the refinements of civilization in the art of life, then the charge must be disallowed. "The *savoir-vivre* is but moderately advanced in Dublin," wrote John Gamble, an Army surgeon, and we know Dublin contrasted very favourably with the provinces in this respect.

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Young in his *Travels in Ireland in 1777* remarked that "There is very good society in Dublin in a Parliament winter, a great round of dinners and parties. . . . The style of living may be guessed from the fortunes of the resident nobility and great commoners; there are about thirty that possess incomes from seven to twenty thousand pounds a year." The standard of living among the wealthy impressed him as different in nothing from that in England. Cf. Maxwell, *Dublin Under the Georges*, p. 270.

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On the other side, too, M. de Beaumont compares the conditions of the people with those of the Indians in America. But he does not compare them with those of the factory workers in England and France, where even the children toiled in the coal mines some eighteen hours a day, with those of the Ruthenian peasant under his Magyar lord, with those of the Sicilians under Bourbon tyranny; or with those of the Spaniard toiling for the welfare of the high-bred nobles of Castile. Only a contemporary observer could have determined with finality what such a comparison would have revealed, but it is to say the least doubtful whether conditions were as bad in Ireland as in Central Europe, in Spain or in the two Sicilies.<sup>1</sup> The fact, though it deserves to be considered, affords no measure of justification for the English misrule in Ireland; for was it not the proud boast of Englishmen that they excelled all others in the art of government? That in consequence their country had acquired a standard of civilization unknown to the peoples of central and southern Europe? The boast, which was not on the whole ill-founded, seems strangely insubstantial when it is found necessary to compare the consequences of British rule in Ireland with those of the rule of the most backward Governments in Europe. Mr. Bowden who visited Dublin in 1790 describes the beggars as "the most abject I have ever seen: those of Madrid are not more naked nor those of Paris more miserable looking spectacles."<sup>2</sup> In the middle years of the century Gladstone exposed the iniquities of King Ferdinand's tyranny in the Two Sicilies in language which stirred the conscience of the world. It was one of the tragedies

<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately it is extremely difficult to secure exact and reliable evidence of rural conditions in the former Hapsburg Empire or in Spain, or the two Sicilies. *Labour in Agriculture*, by L. E. Howard (Oxford, 1935), published under the auspices of the Royal Institute of International Affairs is in many respects a pioneer work and it gives an account of agricultural conditions since 1919. Were such a comparative record available for the period under review there can be no serious doubt that it would substantiate the opinion expressed here.

<sup>2</sup> As noted in Maxwell, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

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of nineteenth-century Irish history that no English statesman with Gladstone's or Bright's deeply inbred love of justice visited Ireland to reveal her plight to a neighbouring people, who were ill-informed rather than ill-intentioned.

The gulf that divided the rich from the poor in the Ireland of the Union was unbridgeable, not as M. de Beaumont would have us suppose, because it was wider than any to be found in other countries, but because there was no middle class to bridge it. The absence of such a class was apparent to all who visited Ireland. In M. de Beaumont's record of the manifold ills of the Irish social system, the growth of the *bourgeoisie* is viewed as an essential preliminary to the application of an effective remedy; whilst Nassau Senior detected that the underlying weakness of the Union settlement lay in the establishment of a single Government to legislate for two countries whose social organizations were sharply contrasted. Whilst "the one country possesses a large middle-class, the other is divided between landlords and peasants."<sup>1</sup> It is a difference which explains a great deal, especially when one recalls how it was accentuated by other factors. "It is frequently overlooked," wrote the same observer, "that the people of England and Ireland—meaning here by Ireland the provinces of Munster and Connaught, some parts of Leinster and the whole county of Donegal—are among the most dissimilar nations in Europe. One is chiefly Protestant, the other is chiefly Roman Catholic; one is principally manufacturing and commercial, the other is almost wholly agricultural; one lives chiefly in towns, the other in the country. The population of the one is laborious but prodigal; that of the other is indolent and idle, but parsimonious. . . . In the one the proprietors of the soil are connected by origin, by interest and by feeling with those who occupy it; in the other they are, in many cases, strangers. In the one public sympathy is with the law; in the other it is with those who

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., vol. 1, p. 199.

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break it. In England crime is infamous; in Ireland it is popular.”<sup>1</sup>

This imposing catalogue (which I have abbreviated considerably) of national differences comprises some that are permanent, others that are incidental and transient. Nassau Senior, who for all his air of academic impartiality makes sure that the “Irish dogs” get the worst of it, concludes that to give similar treatment to countries not merely different but contrasted is prescribing the same regimen “to the weak and to the strong, to the excitable and to the apathetic; to the sound and to the diseased.” The remedy prescribed by this distinguished economist was the political and economic reform conceded to Ireland by a paternal government, not as his own diagnosis would surely suggest—a grant of self-government. But he recognized the incompatibility of despotic government in Ireland side by side with constitutional government in England. In consequence he recommended that while Parliament should resolutely refuse to legislate for Ireland as if she were a distinct state, yet the democratic element there should be allowed to prevail to an extent which would be inadvisable “if we looked to its immediate results; we must allow the people an amount of free action which we know they will abuse, because worse evils even than that abuse will be produced if we restrain it.”

It had been well if Nassau Senior’s enlightened advice had been followed. Democracy is a plant of slow growth, and though the democratization of Irish government in O’Connell’s time would have produced results far different from those which its sponsor envisaged, yet there is no doubt that ultimately the benefits to England would have been less substantial only than those conferred on Ireland. But the treatment, however wise, had little to recommend it in the eyes of the English Government. For such a process would take long to produce results and would therefore, apart from all other considerations,

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., vol. i, pp. 197–200.

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accord ill with the exigencies of party warfare. Moreover, while the Englishmen who knew nothing of Ireland fully endorsed Nassau Senior's opinion that the Irish people "agitate for the sake of agitation and select for their avowed object an unattainable end because it is unattainable—because its mischief cannot be tested by experience or its stimulus by possession," yet unlike him they did not understand, that even if the demand for Repeal be dismissed as a chimera none the less the social and economic conditions of the people were such as would for ever tarnish the reputation of English government.

From de Beaumont to Cavour, from Senior to Engels, every visitor to Ireland regarded the system of land tenure as the chief cause of Irish distress, though final responsibility for its consequences was attributed to different sources. The visitor to Ireland, in the decade preceding the famine was confronted with the cumulative effect of an increasing rural distress. On every estate there was a mass of small farmers. At the bottom of the scale were the cottiers, who cultivated a small plot of land, paying their rent in labour, at the top the Anglo-Irish landlords of whom it was reckoned that one-third were absentees at the time of the Union. During the long Napoleonic Wars, when the price of corn was high, comparative prosperity encouraged both the subdivision of farms and the fixing of rents on a scale that could not be maintained when the price of corn declined. Since the tenant did not enjoy security of tenure the landlord, finding the conversion of arable into pasture a profitable expedient after 1815, planned to consolidate his estates by getting rid of the smaller tenants. This was no solution for anyone except the landlord. With the use of steamboats the cattle trade developed, but it did not give employment. Since an evicted tenant had no capital, hardships ensued which appalled M. de Beaumont. They were accentuated by a rapid growth in population, which between 1800 and 1841 rose from 5,000,000 to 8,175,000. Since the tenants

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had no alternative means of livelihood, those that were not evicted subdivided farms until the estates were covered with multitudes of destitute families. In a country, observed Nassau Senior,<sup>1</sup> "where the three only alternatives are, the occupation of land, beggary or famine—where there is nothing to repress competition and everything to inflame it"—the struggle for land "is like the struggle to buy bread in a besieged town, or to buy water in an African caravan." In 1841 there were 698,549 holdings under fifteen acres and only 127,967 over fifteen acres in extent.<sup>2</sup>

These small farms could not support the families settled on them. In a good year the standard of life was just above starvation level, in a bad year as 1846 the failure of the potato crop on a large scale deprived the majority of the people of their one staple food. Of the mass of the poor cottiers Sir Walter Scott wrote that their cottages would scarce serve for pigsties in Scotland." "Almost alone among mankind," wrote Mill, "the Irish cottier is in this condition that he can scarcely be worse off or better off by any act of his own."<sup>3</sup> None the less the peasant fought tenaciously for the meagre measure of subsistence that the land afforded.

Middle-class sentimentalists who indulge in the fond illusion that the poor, the unemployed, the victims of injustice and tyranny are ordinarily paragons of virtue and patterns of goodness, are horrified at the measures taken by the Irish peasant to retain his land. Not so M. de Beaumont. Profound sympathy with the lot of Irishmen is not permitted to blunt the edge of criticism. For M. de Beaumont understood well that the moral reactions to oppression were no less terrible than its material consequences and were indeed far more difficult to eradicate. That the Irishman was generous, easily inspired

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., vol. 1, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> For fuller detail on the economic side, see Professor George O'Brien's *Economic History of Ireland from the Union to the Famine*.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in J. L. Hammond, *Gladstone and the Irish Nation*, p. 12.

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to enthusiasm, full of vitality and charm M. de Beaumont gladly conceded. But he observed, too, less pleasing traits. The Irishman was slothful, deceitful, intemperate, easily moved to violence; he had an unconquerable aversion to the truth; he was continually affirming "upon my honour, upon my word": which the Frenchman not unhappily described as a "*locution familière à ceux qui ne disent point la vérité.*" No less remarkable appeared the Irishman's aversion to work. Many Irishmen, wrote de Beaumont,<sup>1</sup> who are wretched, increase their misery by their idleness. A little work would alleviate their lot, but nothing seems to stir them from their apathy. Nassau Senior expressed a rather different view when he said that, while the Irish work well for a master, "they are negligent taskmasters to themselves."<sup>2</sup> M. de Beaumont, too, attributed to the Irishman some more terrible characteristics. "Violent and vindictive," he wrote, "the Irishman displays the most ferocious cruelty in his acts of vengeance. . . . The evicted tenant . . . takes terrible reprisals and the punishment he invents in his savage fury cannot be contemplated without horror. Often in his anger he is as unjust as he is cruel and he takes revenge on persons quite innocent of the misfortunes he has experienced."

M. de Beaumont felt that these traits in the Irish character had been brought into unhappy prominence by the course of Irish history. A competent observer writing to Sir Robert Peel in 1844 said that:

"The peasantry of Ireland do more or less obtain from the Whitefoot associations that essential protection to their existence which the established law of the country refuses to afford. The Whitefoot system is the practical and effective check upon the ejectment system. It cannot be denied that, but for the salutary terror inspired by the Whitefoot the clearance of estates (which in the over-peopled districts of Ireland is considered, justly or not, to be the only mode of

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., vol. i, p. 351.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., vol. i, p. 199.



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improving or even of saving them), would proceed with a rapidity and to an extent that must occasion the most horrible sufferings to hundreds and thousands of the ejected tenantry.”<sup>1</sup> Such was the immediate cause of the savage violence of the land war; such was the occasion for outrages against man and beast, for the mutilation of ewes and the maiming of cattle; outrages that were the more terrible in that it was the innocent who so often suffered. As the provocation to a people long deprived of education was great, so too, the retribution was fearful. But to the humane man no hardship can afford justification for what was done. There are phases in the history of Ireland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which find the only commentary in the lines of Aeschylus—

Lo! sin by sin and sorrow dogged by sorrow  
And who the end can know?

Some allowance must always be made for M. de Beaumont's love of generalizations. All the peasants were neither habitual liars nor vindictive whatever the occasion, no more were all landlords wealthy, rack-renting absentees. M. de Beaumont's statements need qualification. But it must be admitted that when he describes the Anglo-Irish landlords as “une mauvaise aristocratie,” he is speaking the sober truth. They were bad aristocracy not because they were personally deficient in good qualities but because they were instruments, later in some measure the victims, of an intolerable and unworkable system. The Devon Commission while commenting on “the great extent of misery” that would follow ill-considered evictions maintained that the “sweeping charges” of cruelty brought against the Irish landlord were much exaggerated.

The peasant was lazy, said M. de Beaumont, because circumstances made him so. The issue for him was not a choice between a wretched existence which was the fruit of his own

<sup>1</sup> Poulett Scrope, Letter to Lord Melbourne, 1834, reprinted and addressed to Sir R. Peel, 1844. Quoted in E. L. Woodward, *The Age of Reform*, p. 319.

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indolence and a life of comfort earned by hard work; in any event he would be wretched, so he considered merely whether he would be a little more or a little less unhappy and decided the slight accession of comfort that alone was possible was not worth the extra work involved.<sup>1</sup> Likewise the Irish peasant was ruthless because he believed he was averting or avenging wrong. His cruelty was extreme, just because it was inspired in part by moral passion. Likewise, too, absentee landlords were content to be mere rent-receivers, parasites on the wealth of a country they rarely, if ever, visited, simply because history and circumstances encouraged them to be so.

M. de Beaumont's indictment against the landlords is in one respect unjust. He exonerates the British Government of a responsibility which certainly was theirs, by pointing out that, contrary to current belief, British rule in Ireland was not absolute, but rather was dependent on the administrative machine ensconced in Dublin Castle. This argument has no validity whatever. Under the Union the British Government was responsible for the good government of Ireland. If its agents in Dublin disregarded its instructions that was no reason for an abdication of authority. On the contrary it was an occasion for its unsparing exercise. The truth indeed is far simpler. The British Government was passive, more landlord than the landlords as Dr. Hammond has observed,<sup>2</sup> simply because that was its fully considered policy. Legislation enacted in 1815 and 1818 by the British Parliament facilitated the process of eviction. Why? Because the peasant was viewed in the philosophy of that time as an incubus on society, his survival as a barrier to social and economic progress. For this reason the tenant farmers of England were being converted into labourers and it was thought well to facilitate a similar process in Ireland. The motive was not malevolent, it was economic. And the evils caused by its application were not remedied because the orthodox economy of their day, the theory of

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., vol. i, pp. 356-7.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 13.

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Ricardo, of the Utilitarians, affirmed that measures of positive relief to improve the lot of the poor were outside the proper function of government. This belief, responsible for the long endured miseries of the early Industrial Revolution and of the incredible hours of work in factories and mines in the Black Country, prevented the subsidizing of Irish agriculturalists in any form.

M. de Beaumont urged that since the Irish landlord was in all too many instances a mere rent receiver, the duties and functions proper to his position should in part at any rate be discharged by the Government. But the recommendation stood no chance of adoption. Sir George Cornewall Lewis, in a letter written in 1838 to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, rejected on grounds of *principle* any suggestion that the Irish agriculture, and the community dependent on it, should be assisted by constructive effort on the part of the Government. He wrote: "A government can only, as it seems to me, attempt to accelerate the improvement of the soil by *indirect* means. In this as in most other cases connected with the *material* part of civilization, its functions are simply negative, it can do no more than remove the obstacles to amelioration and suffer a society to proceed unchecked in its natural career of advancement."<sup>1</sup> The age of the positive state was not yet.<sup>2</sup> In the England of the heyday of the industrial revolution, such a political doctrine involved both the amassing of great wealth and untold suffering; in Ireland where agriculture, not industry, constituted the all-important source of livelihood, it precluded positive reform and in so doing it marked out the road that led to famine and to death.

The landowners of Ireland possessed the same political out-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Hammond, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> O'Connell himself was profoundly influenced by the teachings of classical economists. His reactions to proposals for positive economic action had much in common with those of Cornewall Lewis. This very interesting point is brought out clearly in Mr. Sean O'Faolain's biography entitled *The King of the Beggars*.

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look as the mill owners and manufacturers of England. The inhumanity of both alike was due to callousness and indifference, not to vindictive cruelty. Their outlook was that of the governing class of their day. The enclosures of landlords in Tudor England were bitterly denounced by the first Reformers. But where Latimer had preached with fiery eloquence from the text in Isaiah:<sup>1</sup> "Woe to them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth," the Church of the nineteenth century was silent. The age of morality had been superseded by the age of economics. The landlords were like the Florentine brothers in Keats's *Isabella*—

Half-ignorant they turned an easy wheel  
That set sharp racks at work to pinch and peel.

And there was none to reprove them.

Not all the landlords were either Anglo-Irish or absentee or indifferent, but the deep roots of mistrust generated through the centuries, hampered the efforts even of the well-intentioned. "Une mauvaise aristocratie" it was, even though many landlords made what retribution lay in their power in the years of famine, even though the destiny of their class at the last was unhappy. Those landlords, whom de Beaumont observed, in their arrogance and wealth and luxury were only some twenty years later associated by Engels with debt and the bankruptcy court, and early in the new century their great estates were divided up. To-day the traveller visiting Ireland almost exactly a century after de Beaumont will see a country of peasant proprietors and small farms, with here and there great rusty gates breaking the monotonous length of some crumbling desmesne wall, which open on to a grass-grown drive. Far back from the road enveloped in ivy, lie the blackened ruins of some country house recalling, not without a pang of nostalgic regret, the elegance and the culture of

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah v. 8.

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a vanished order. "Of a truth," cried the prophet Isaiah, "many houses shall be desolate, even great and fair, without inhabitant." They are—but in acquiring a just land system rural Ireland has lost a potential source of culture as well.

In Ireland the indictment against England is regarded as political in character. The vindictive suppression of rebellion looms larger than the continuance of economic distress. Yet in retrospect the failure to introduce a tolerable standard of life in Ireland seems the less pardonable. The Irish have rarely compared their political treatment with that of other subject nationalities or of minorities in Europe. Yet in fact the suppression of La Vendée was as brutal, probably more so, than that of Ireland in '98, certainly the crushing of revolt in Spain, in Italy, in Hungary in the nineteenth century was more savage in character than that of contemporary repression in Ireland. But the poverty of the country after centuries of English rule was an admission of dismal failure in a field where success was practicable. Save only in Ulster where, as de Beaumont acutely observed,<sup>1</sup> the comparative freedom from poverty due to industrial development and a more equitable land law allowed of a measure of political consciousness, not to be found elsewhere, the standard of life in Ireland was almost as deplorable as it had been in the age of the Tudors. It was in 1568 that Sir Henry Sidney, Lord Deputy of Ireland, visited the south and sent a terrible account of its misery and devastation to his Queen. Of Munster he wrote:

"As touching the estate of the whole country, for so much as I saw of it having travelled from Youghal to Cork, from Cork to Kinsale, and from thence to the uttermost bounds of it towards Limerick; like as I never was in a more pleasant country in all my life, so never saw I a more waste and desolate land, no, not in the confines of other countries where actual war hath continually been kept by the greatest princes of Christendom; and never heard I such lamentable cries and

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., vol. II, pp. 48-53.

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doleful complaints made by the small remain of the poor people which yet are left.”<sup>1</sup> The misery of Connaught described by de Beaumont in 1844 would not have been out of place in Sir Henry Sidney’s record. And this fact constitutes a fitting commentary on the measure of neglect and misrule in Ireland in those two and a half centuries in which England rose from a small island state to become mistress of the greatest Empire the world has ever known.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in A. L. Rowse, *Sir Richard Grenville of the “Revenge.”*

## CHAPTER II

# *Italian Nationalists and the Irish Question*

“One’s country, before all, is the *consciousness* of country.”

MAZZINI

To the Young Men of Italy (1859)

To change the English temper towards Ireland, to shake fundamental views of property or economics, to overcome all the prejudices that estrange men divided by race, religion and history, to interest Parliament in duties to which it was indifferent, this was a task in which no man could hope to succeed if his mind never moved outside the English orbit. In these words Dr. Hammond defines the task with which Gladstone was faced when he undertook to champion the cause of Home Rule. Unlike the majority of his contemporaries Gladstone both understood the character of the task that awaited him and possessed the courage to advocate a solution certain to be unpopular and misinterpreted in England. It was a case in which comprehension was even more remarkable than the action which followed from it. For as John Stuart Mill and de Beaumont were well aware there were no people less fitted to understand Irish problems than the English. Ireland had so long been in subjection harsh enough to embitter, yet not complete enough finally to subdue, that English statesmen were no longer capable of seeing her problems and her discontents in perspective. From the prevalent, apathetic, insular approach common to English statesmen, Gladstone’s stands out in sharp relief. He looked at Ireland through the

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eyes of a European. He had travelled widely, he had learned what Europe thought of English rule in Ireland. A chance meeting with Guizot, who like him brought great qualities of mind into the service of the State, had a profound influence on Gladstone's Irish policy. He wrote to Guizot long afterwards, saying:

"It is very unlikely that you should remember a visit I paid you, I think at Passy in the autumn of 1845. . . . The Maynooth Act had just been passed. Its author, I think, meant it to be final. I had myself regarded it as seminal. And you in congratulating me upon it, said we should have the sympathies of Europe in the work of giving Ireland justice—a remark which evidently included more than the measure just passed, and which I have ever after saved and pondered. It helped me on towards what has since been done."<sup>1</sup>

What Gladstone did and still more what he tried to do for Ireland was the fruit of his European sense. In the Irish question, says Dr. Hammond in that remarkable book of which this is the principal theme.<sup>2</sup> Gladstone the European came into conflict with the firm and fixed ideas of the English ruling class. The Home Rule struggle was "a battle between men moving within the circle of an island mind and a man who lived in the wisdom of the ages," a man who was deeply religious, a man who was steeped in the learning and literature of Greece. It was the duty of Englishmen, Gladstone once told the House of Commons, to remove Irish grievances "so that instead of hearing in every corner of Europe the most painful commentaries on the policy of England towards Ireland we may be able to look our fellow Europeans in the face." Like Gladstone, his enigmatic rival, Disraeli, also appreciated the European background to the Irish Question. By race, by tradition, by intellect, he was indeed well qualified to do so. In his "Young England" days Disraeli's analysis of Irish prob-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Morley, *Life of Gladstone*, vol. II, p. 240.

<sup>2</sup> *Gladstone and the Irish Nation*, pp. 738-9.



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lems was remarkable for its truth and insight, but when he became the leader of the Tories, surrounded by colleagues sprung from and representative of the land-owning classes he cast off the last remnants of his inconvenient radical clothes. Like Gladstone, a European outlook enabled him to see the Irish Question in true perspective, but unlike Gladstone he had not the energy and perhaps not even the assurance to run counter to the cherished convictions of Englishmen on so controversial a subject. Perhaps, to be just, only an Englishman by birth and creed could have challenged his fellow countrymen as Gladstone did in 1886.<sup>1</sup> Disraeli was the leader of the Tories, but he was not a member of the ruling class.

The comments of European observers on various phases of Irish history confirm a belief that the European background to the Irish Question was but little better understood by the Irish leaders than by English statesmen. That is one reason why these comments deserve to be rescued from oblivion. That European critics were more conscious of the political significance of the historical process in Ireland than were Irishmen themselves is a matter of no small moment. But what is supremely important is the fact that the Irish Question cannot be understood apart from its European context. During the last century Italian and Magyar, Czech and Pole were more concerned with the question of whether Ireland was to be numbered as one among the resurgent nationalities of Europe, than Ireland on her side was aware of her position as one engaged with the historic nations of Europe in a struggle to regain independence. In Ireland there was no one who used the analogy of the Slav, or Czech struggle for independence as, for example, Havlitchek used the nationalist movement under O'Connell<sup>2</sup> to inspire his compatriots at Prague. The articles, in *le Journal de Prague*, in which this gifted journalist popularized the name of "Repeal" and which led in time to

<sup>1</sup> Vide Hammond's interesting comment, op. cit., pp. 33-4.

<sup>2</sup> Vide E. Denis, *Le Bohême depuis la Montagne Blanche*, vol. II, p. 224 seq.

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the foundation of a Czech "Repeal Club," as an association of intellectual nationalists, afford an illustration of this contrast between the European attitude to nationalism as a cosmopolitan political movement and the Irish tendency to regard it as an individual isolated revolt. No doubt geography has been largely responsible for isolating Ireland from the main current of European nationalism, but it is clear that in the years which followed the execution of Tone and the failure of the United Irishmen, the Irish people were curiously ill informed as to the significance of the revolts against Imperial dominion in Italy, in the Empire, in Poland, in the Balkans. It was in the streets of Paris, not in the streets of Dublin, that the crowds came out in 1831 singing the refrain from *La Varsovie*:

Pour nos vieux frères d'armes  
N'aurez vous que des larmes ?  
Frères, c'était de sang que nous versions pour vous !

in protest against the Czar's brutal suppression of the Poles. When Arthur Griffith defined the aims of Irish nationalism by comparison with Magyar achievement he unfolded a new field of vision to the majority of his readers. The "Resurrection of Hungary" enabled Irishmen to understand, what Tone and Mitchel had long since understood, that Irish nationalism could reinforce its strength and broaden its inspiration from the varied expressions of the nationalist movement in Europe.

This comparative isolation from continental influences lends a fascinating interest to the discovery of what European observers thought from time to time of the contemporary political scene in Ireland. Here an attempt to survey so wide a field in its entirety would be out of place, but one may hope to throw some side-lights on recent Irish history which reached its climax in the overthrow of the Union. And if in the following pages attention is confined to the observations of Italian

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nationalists and of the apostles of modern communism upon Irish problems, it is not because the commentary they supply is more accurate or more profound than that of other observers, but rather because the conclusions at which they arrive are at once illuminating and surprising. My choice was confirmed by a belief that the comments of these observers are virtually unknown in Ireland or in England.

It should be noted at once that both Italian and Marxist clearly miscalculated the relative strength of the political forces in contemporary Ireland. That serves to make their commentary the more instructive since it emphasizes the danger of interpreting Irish history in the light of subsequent events. Anglo-Irish relations had no *inevitable* solution as the land question had no *inevitable* outcome. What has been done has been achieved by the conscious will of a people: it has not been the product of some rigid ordinance of history. And if the opinions of European observers serve merely to remind us that even in the second half of the nineteenth century the force that was to dominate Ireland's political future was not yet apparent, then we shall read them not without profit, for such external judgments will help us to place a seminal period in the historical perspective so essential to its understanding.

### ITALIAN NATIONALISM

"When France sneezes," said Metternich, "all Europe catches cold." In the early Spring of 1848 the Orleans monarchy was overthrown in Paris and its fall heralded a year of Revolution in Europe. From the Seine to the Vistula, from the Elbe to the Danube, to the shores of the Adriatic and over the length and breadth of Italy, Liberals and Nationalists united to overthrow the old order in Europe. To Italian patriots it seemed as though the great moment in the Italian Risorgimento had come, that "the hour of Austria had struck."

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“Italia Una!” now the war-cry rang  
From Alp to Etna; and her dreams were done  
And she herself had wakened into life  
And stood full armed and free . . .

On May 8, 1848, Angelo Brofferio, leader of the Radicals, speaking in the first Piedmontese Chamber of Deputies in the Carignano Palace at Turin, urged immediate war upon Austria. A peroration in which he recalled to deputies the precepts of Daniel O’Connell is a stirring example of demagogic oratory in Italy.

“Too many injuries have we to avenge, too many accounts to settle, too many insults to wipe out, and too much cause for boasting has our last retreat given to Austria, for us not to seek with all our power to prove to the foreigner, who watches us and laughs, that the bells of the Sicilian Vespers and the trumpet of the Lombard League and the devouring flames of Pietro Micca are not the symbols of an ancient pride but the glories of the present (prolonged applause). Pursue this policy of useless delay and what will you find in Lombardy? Leave the Bohemians to sack it, the Bavarians to burn it, and the blood-thirsty Croat to dye its soil with Italian blood, and when the hour of victory sounds you will reconquer cities destroyed, a devastated countryside and a people wasted with misery—you will build it again, but you will build upon ruin and ashes. When O’Connell the great apostle of Irish liberty rose against the oppression of Britain, ‘three things I urge upon you,’ he said, ‘sons of Ireland: agitate, agitate, agitate! And I, O Italians, urge three things upon you: audacity, audacity, audacity.’ (Clamorous and prolonged applause.)”<sup>1</sup>

It is in a context and on an occasion such as this that one would expect to find a reference to the Irish nationalist movement, though an Irish speaker might prefer to invoke other names than that of O’Connell when advocating a policy of “audacity.” But in Italy O’Connell’s reputation remained un-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in A. J. Whyte, *Political Life and Letters of Cavour*, vol. ii, p. 21.

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challenged. Professor Trevelyan writes: "O'Connell's methods in Ireland and Cobden's in England were quoted by Moderates and Mazzinians alike, as models of organization to be imitated in Italian national affairs."<sup>1</sup> The address of Tommaseo, prepared to welcome Cobden on his visit to Venice, is typical. "England [sic] alone has given the world the spectacle of an advocate [O'Connell] more powerful than warrior or sovereign, who incites and restrains millions by his voice alone; a friar [Father Mathew] who by his voice alone regenerates through temperance tens of thousands of men of different religions; a private citizen [Cobden] who makes the greatest of living statesmen his disciple, subjugates wrong-headed opinion . . . who while obeying the law gives orders to the law." The tribute to England, largely undeserved, expresses by implication the Italian belief that Ireland's efforts were directed to the securing of good government and that the claim to distinct nationality was subordinate to it.

Such casual allusions recall the half realist, half romantic attitude towards Ireland with which Italians of that time were very familiar. Lacking in any intrinsic significance they yet serve to place in perspective the more authoritative judgments pronounced by Cavour and Mazzini. The more detailed opinions of these two famous Italians were for the most part expressed between 1842-65; that is to say at least twenty years before Home Rule became the declared policy of the Nationalist Party and half a century before the birth of the Sinn Fein movement. Cavour surveyed the Ireland of O'Connell; Mazzini, a country whose vitality was sapped by famine, whose resources were diminished by emigration, a country at the ebb tide of its fortunes. Yet the contrast in material conditions appears to have influenced the substance of their judgment scarcely at all.

The majority of the great Italian patriots of the Risorgimento were "anglophile" in sentiment. In the long years of exile

<sup>1</sup> *Manin and the Venetian Revolution of 1848*, p. 53.

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Italian nationalists found in London a welcome such as they could find in no other capital of Europe. Cavour, that most practical of statesmen, dreamed for one brief moment that English troops might fight on the plains of Lombardy for the independence of Italy. And even if, in the event, it was Louis Napoleon who was the victor of Magenta and Solferino, Italian sentiment still cherished English friendship as her most valued possession. That sentiment was not mistaken; for Englishmen invariably felt a genuine affection for people "struggling to be free"—so long as their struggles did not threaten "the integrity of the United Kingdom." In the opinion of Italian statesmen there may be detected therefore a disposition to interpret contemporary Ireland in a manner not unduly displeasing to their English friends. This was supplemented by a certain antagonism between "Italian and Irish Nationalists." The future of the temporal dominions of the Papacy divided them, for here Irish Catholic opinion took what was in Italy the unpopular, the anti-nationalist side. It was a sympathy which the Italians, engaged in a life and death struggle for a united and independent nation, did not readily forgive or forget. Yet when every allowance is made, it is indeed remarkable that men so antagonistic in outlook, so different in temperament, as Mazzini and Cavour should find themselves in substantial agreement on Ireland.

### COUNT CAVOUR ON IRELAND

In the years 1842-3 Cavour spent eight months in France and England. During that time his able and acquisitive intellect was engaged in assimilating the political and social structure of the lands he visited. Soon he became interested in the Irish question. He wrote to Auguste de la Rive on his return to Piedmont, in a letter dated August 24, 1843.<sup>1</sup> After

<sup>1</sup> This letter is quoted in A. J. Whyte, *Early Life and Letters of Cavour*, p. 286.

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giving some account of events in Italy, he said, "However, as I find I have some spare time, I have allowed myself to be dominated by the fury with which all these idiotic articles upon Ireland, appearing daily in the papers of all colours and countries, inspires me; and I set myself to write an article upon this question. . . ." He proceeded to indicate the character of the article which indeed was destined to reach the dimensions of "a small book." "My opinions," he wrote, "are opposed to those current on the continent: they will, I believe, displease everyone except you and a few reasonable people like you. I wish at all costs to maintain the Union, first in the interests of Ireland herself, then in that of England, and finally in the interest of material and intellectual civilization. The motive on which I oppose the plans of O'Connell will as much displease the one side as my opinion of the opportuneness of these plans will displease the other."

The article on Ireland duly appeared in the *Bibliothèque Universelle de Genève* early in 1844. It attracted considerable attention, was quoted in the House of Commons and has twice been translated into English.<sup>1</sup>

In the years that elapsed between Catholic Emancipation and the Repeal of the Corn Laws, European papers made Ireland an habitual theme for discussion. Usually brief on the affairs of England, as Cavour observed, they filled their columns with reports of the smallest meetings in favour of the repeal of the Union. "From the hopes, from the ill-concealed joy of certain journals of certain political parties, when they speak of Ireland it is clear that they delight in the prospect that this crisis threatens with violent catastrophe the ancient edifice of the British constitution." The reason was the quite simple one that public opinion on the Continent was as a whole hostile to England. "Extreme parties opposed in all else besides agree

<sup>1</sup> The extracts that follow are taken from the translation by W. Hodgson entitled, *Thoughts on the Present State and on the Future of Ireland*. Manchester, 1868. The book first appeared in English in 1845.

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in their violent hatred of that country. Moderate parties love it in theory, but in reality they feel towards it little instinctive sympathy. From St. Petersburg to Madrid, in Germany as in Italy, the enemies of progress and the partisans of revolution alike regard England as their most formidable foe."

Cavour did not share the general antipathy. He associated himself with those "few isolated persons superior to the passions of the crowd" who cherish toward England the feelings of esteem and of interest "which may well be inspired by one of the greatest nations that have done honour to humanity." But he did not allow his admiration for England to make him insensible to the wrongs or indifferent to the cause of those evils in Ireland whose "oppressive reality cannot be denied." His brief review of Irish history before the Union in the opening chapters of the book is unsparing in its denunciation of the then existing system of government. The penal laws at first inspired by religious fanaticism lost by degrees their primitive character and became in the hands of those who applied them a means of social domination. During the greater part of the eighteenth century the Irish peasant was reduced to a state of slavery worse than that of the negroes in the Antilles. "During this period," Cavour concludes, "Ireland presents the saddest spectacle to be found in any civilized society—complete and absolute oppression of the poor by the rich, of him who labours by him who possesses, organized by the laws and administered by the ministers of justice." It was this social domination that aroused his most bitter condemnation, for he observed that the religious persecution was unfortunately not exceptional in that age, the injustices inflicted on Irish Catholics being matched and indeed surpassed by those inflicted on the Huguenots after the Repeal of the Edict of Nantes.

Cavour regarded the Act of Union as an "irreproachably just," economic and political settlement of Anglo-Irish relations. He wrote: "We must distinguish between the merits



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of this measure in itself and the means employed to accomplish it. There can be but one voice to blast the infamy of those who trafficked the independence of their country, who bartered their rights and their political influence for money and places, who sold their vote and sanctioned an act which their conscience censured. But must we equally condemn the Government which bought these corruptions? I should not hesitate to do so, were it not that by a fatal error, public opinion in past centuries, and even in our own, has in some sort sanctioned governments in the use of morals different from those they recognize for individuals; if it had not at all times treated with excessive indulgence immoral acts which have led to great political results."

Then Cavour proceeded to maintain that the Union had achieved "great political results" for the United Kingdom; he argued that the repeal of the Union would be damaging to Ireland's interests. "Europe in general," he wrote, "has applauded the conduct of O'Connell and has seemingly agreed with him in believing that the legislative independence of Ireland is the only effectual remedy for the evils of that country. I regard this notion as erroneous and as fatal to the improvement of the condition of the Irish people." Cavour reached this conclusion after analysing the question of repeal under five headings: Taxation; Commerce and Industry; Public Works; Emigration and Poor Rates; and the Reform of Territorial Property. On all these counts Cavour decided that Ireland's material gain lay in the maintenance of the Union, not so much because of what it had achieved, but because of what it might achieve. If the Melbourne Ministry had been as powerful in England as in Ireland, if it could have commanded a majority in the House sufficient to compel the Lords to adopt remedial measures for Ireland, then all that country's ills would have been on the way to cure; for political reforms would have made possible the enactment of those social reforms which alone could restore conditions of repose and

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prosperity. So Cavour argued, but later experience has made that "if" loom large indeed, for it has showed that a moderate policy towards Ireland was unlikely to command the support of a majority in the United Kingdom.

Yet it is probable that on the broad view Cavour was right. England was entering upon the heyday of her industrial supremacy. For the next half century she was to remain unchallenged as the foremost industrial and commercial nation in the world. Had Ireland been prepared frankly and fully to renounce her nationalist claims, and to devote the energies dissipated, if you will, on the political field, to the development of her material resources, then it is possible, even probable, that England would have recognized her claim to participate in the fruits of industrial expansion and that as a consequence Ireland would have attained a far greater degree of prosperity by the end of the century than in fact she did. There was a price to be paid, the sacrifice of a belief in a distinct nationality. It was a great one indeed. But what if, as Cavour by implication assumed, this claim to a distinct nationality were no more than an illusion fostered by centuries of injustice and oppression? Then indeed the realist had but one path to pursue—to remedy those injustices, to reform the existing Irish economy, particularly the land system, and to foster co-operation between the various parts of the British Isles on the basis of unity, equality and of a common participation in a common benefit.

It is improbable that O'Connell and his contemporaries realized as clearly as Cavour the choice that lay before Ireland—material prosperity, or years of bitterness and frustration devoted to the realization of the national principle. It is certain that Irish nationalists reckoned material prosperity to weigh lightly in the balance against national independence. Cavour wrote as a spectator, who analysed an intricate question with lucidity and without bias but always in the light of a cold, unemotional reason. "His purely economic handling of the

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question," writes Mr. Whyte, "and his failure to attach any weight to the claims of national sentiment is typical of his outlook at this time."<sup>1</sup> Even in Piedmont, Italians mistrusted this liberal intellectual and landowner, whose "heart is in his brain, whose sentiment is the slave of reason" and who concealed beneath a cold exterior of practical materialism a patriotism so devoted as made him one day the architect of a united Italy, the sober-minded hero of a national movement whose romantic qualities charmed the imagination of the world. And if in his essay on Ireland Cavour neglected what history has shown to be most significant, it was partly because feeling "so far from the scene of action" it seemed reckless to attempt to weigh imponderables. So he confined himself to the material aspect of Ireland and based his conclusion on the facts at his disposal.

His opinions on outstanding events have not lost interest and I have selected a few to illustrate the quality of his judgment.

On the Act of Union:

"Britain committed an enormous fault in not granting to the Catholics emancipation as a consequence of the Act of Union."

On the Reform Bill of 1832:

"Parliamentary Reform cannot, any more than emancipation, dry up the springs of popular agitation in Ireland. Lord Grey erred in regarding it as the proper boundary of the reforming Party."

On the economy of Ireland in 1842:

"Ireland is a country (except in the North) exclusively agricultural. This is ordinarily a condition eminently favourable to the maintenance of order and of peace; but here it is otherwise. The land to which the Irish are attached by an insurmountable necessity belongs almost wholly to a foreign race, which has for them neither sympathy nor affection, with which they are not united by the multitude of moral ties that everywhere else exist between the owners and cultivators of the soil."

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 286-7.

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On the Anglo-Irish aristocracy:

"While I acknowledge the very important place which the aristocracy has held, and still holds, in the British constitution, I utterly reject the claim of the Irish aristocracy to be regarded as on a similar footing. How can two things so widely different be likened to one another? . . . The two aristocracies have assuredly no more in common than a sound and vigorous arm has with its fellow which gangrene has blighted."

His realization of the disastrous effects of absentee landlordism were the more acute because his own experience led him to lay great stress on the moral and material value of a resident aristocracy.

"It is difficult to estimate with justice the value which a wealthy or even well-to-do family living in the midst of a poor and ignorant peasantry can exercise. . . . It is so easy for an enlightened and well disposed landowner to win the affection and respect of all those about him, that he can acquire, without very much effort, a moral influence more powerful and effective than all the material influence exercised by the possessors of the soil under the feudal system. If ever the majority of landowners consent to devote themselves to the betterment of their estates without neglecting the lot of those who cultivate them, if these same proprietors strive to spread around them healthy knowledge and good principles, the social hierarchy will rebuild itself upon much sounder bases than those which 1789 destroyed."<sup>1</sup>

Cavour, in this as in many other respects a typical representative of nineteenth-century liberalism, had unbounded faith in education. Rightly he diagnosed that education constituted the most fundamental social remedy for the Ireland of his day. With equal firmness he maintained that such education should not be clerical. "While I honour the sincere faith of the Catholic clergy their zealous charity their boundless

<sup>1</sup> From an article in the *Bibliothèque Universelle de Genève*, September, 1843: quoted in Whyte, *op. cit.*, pp. 290-1.

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devotion," he wrote, "yet I do not recognize in them the qualities necessary to direct successfully popular instruction. Their profound ignorance, their numerous prejudices, their exaggerated political notions render them unfit to fulfil the task of primary teachers."

He was outspoken, too, in his denunciation of the absentee landlords of Ireland, observing, too, that "all these evils are aggravated by the presence of a Protestant clergy who divide with the rich proprietors the fruit of the toil of the devotedly Catholic population in the midst of which they live." But at the same time Cavour's view of the importance of a properly constituted hierarchy of the land led him to fear the revival of a Dublin Parliament on the ground that it might "despoil landowners" instead of reforming the system and so provoke civil war. But he had no sympathy whatever with the existing conditions in rural Ireland.

In conclusion, it is of interest to recall Cavour's estimate of Daniel O'Connell. In 1843 he wrote: "Though O'Connell at times uses the language of a thorough democrat he is at heart, as regards the laws of property, friendly to the aristocratic system." And just after the meeting on Tara Hill in 1843, Cavour unimpressed by appearances, wrote: "O'Connell's conduct proves clearly that he is audacious only in proportion to the patience of his adversaries."<sup>1</sup> It is not a far cry from this verdict on O'Connell to that of Young Ireland on the "rose-water revolutionary" and the opinion of Cavour recalls the substance—though not indeed the vigorous expression—of that famous sketch, in which John Mitchel has portrayed "a man of giant proportions in body and mind; with no profound learning, indeed, even in his own profession of the law, but with a vast and varied knowledge of human nature, in all its strength, and especially in all its weakness; with a voice like thunder and earthquake, yet musical and soft at will as the song of birds, with profound and spon-

<sup>1</sup> Noted in Thayer, *Life and Times of Cavour*, vol. 1, p. 64. New York, 1911.

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taneous natural feeling . . . yet withal, a boundless fund of masterly affectation and consummate histrionism, hating and loving heartily, outrageous in his merriment, and passionate in his lamentation, he had the power to make other men laugh or weep at his good pleasure—in so much that Daniel O’Connell, by virtue of being more intensely Irish . . . than other Irishmen, led and swayed his people by a kind of divine, or else diabolic, right.

“He led them, as I believe, all wrong for forty years. He was a lawyer, and never could come to the point of denying and defying all British law. He was a Catholic, sincere and devout; and would not see that the Church had ever been the enemy of Irish Freedom. He was an aristocrat, by position and by taste; and the name of Republic was odious to him.”<sup>1</sup>

This brilliant and malicious portrait reminds us that Cavour judged O’Connell’s policy from his own experience of the nationalist movement in Italy, and it is not surprising that an Italian patriot, who had grown up in an atmosphere of conspiracy and violence, should pronounce a similar verdict. For Cavour knew that Italy could win her independence only by force of arms; he realized too that conflict with the Church for possession of the temporal dominions was inevitable. In Italy a middle course was impossible. “Between the dagger of the Carbonari and the chocolate of the Jesuit,” said Charles Albert the King of Sardinia, “I know no peace.” And if it seemed to Cavour, as it seemed to Mitchel, that O’Connell in pursuing a policy of moderation, blunted the force of the nationalist movement; and if furthermore it seemed to Cavour, not without reason, that O’Connell’s policy was favoured by the vast majority of the Irish people, then the reasons for his conclusion that Ireland desired good government rather than national government became clear enough. And such reasons, it should be added, whatever view may be taken of their validity, do not imply a condemnation of O’Connell’s leader-

<sup>1</sup> John Mitchel, *Jail Journal*.

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ship. But they do give a European interpretation to that distinction which O'Connell drew between *national separation*, which he considered undesirable and *national independence*, which he resolved to restore by effecting the Repeal of the Union.

### MAZZINI ON IRELAND

The life of Joseph Mazzini was characterized by a devotion to the cause of nationality of an intensity unsurpassed in the annals of Europe. Yet his life, though crowned with notable achievements, leaves one with a sense of frustration. He wrote, he slaved, he conspired for the cause of Italian liberty at a time when Italian despair was blackest and Italian divisions seemed eternal. Admired by all the world in 1848-9 as the unyielding triumvir of the short-lived Roman Republic yet he lived on, an unsparing critic of the United Italy for whose creation he had sacrificed all. For Mazzini was rigid, uncompromising, and it must be confessed, a bitter doctrinaire. Italian unity must be won by the methods he advocated and in accordance with the principles he held with such unswerving tenacity if Mazzini was to co-operate. He would not acknowledge the Italian monarchy even though an Italy free and united at last owed so much to the House of Savoy. Yet despite his faults his strength of purpose was a source of inspiration to nationalists in every land. One recalls that on November 19, 1853, when John Mitchel heard the first rumours of impending war in the Crimea, he thought how the news "would refresh many a weary exile," and he saw before him, in vision, Giuseppe Mazzini, with his lofty brow and pensive eye, shadowed by many a doleful memory, of the murdered Menotte . . . of the youthful brothers Bandiera . . . and the noble struggle of those last of Romans in fatal '48 . . . but now Mazzini looks up again with hope. . . O, Triumvir, is this dawning hope also to fade in another evening of despair? Is this to end but

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in another Romiorno expedition? Another Carbonaro conspiracy? Another Roman carnage? Mazzini knows not; but one thing he knows—if the neck of this foul European ‘peace’ be once broken the cypress branch of young Italy will be reared again and the resolute watchword *Ora e sempre* shall ring along the Appenine.” Like Mazzini, Mitchel too believed that a European war would bring nearer the hour of national resurgence.

You that Mitchel’s prayer have heard  
“Send us war in our time O Lord.”<sup>1</sup>

It is at first sight surprising to discover that Mazzini, the doctrinaire republican, held opinions similar to those of Cavour the nationalist aristocrat on the national movement in Ireland. In 1847 Mazzini founded a People’s International League to resume the work of Young Europe. Some Repealers complained to the League that it had omitted Ireland from the list of the nationalities of the future. Mazzini drafted an answer. He argued that the Irish demand was essentially one for better government only; and while he had every sympathy with their “just consciousness of human dignity, claiming its long violated rights” with their “wish to have rulers, educators, not masters,” with their “protests against legislation grounded on distrust and hostility,” he yet maintained that the Irish claim was not a national claim. He believed that the nationalist movement was not likely to be permanent, and he refused to see in it any elements of true nationality because the Irish “did not plead for any distinct principle of life or system of legislation, derived from native peculiarities, and contrasting radically with English wants and wishes,” nor claimed for their country any “high special function” to discharge in the interests of humanity. The spectacle of the great Irish Exodus after the Famine appalled him. “They come and tell us,” he said, “that it is a well ordered state of society in which, for lack of a few

<sup>1</sup> W. B. Yeats’ Last Poems, under Ben Balben.



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potatoes, thousands, and even millions are reduced to starvation." But sympathy did not alter his judgment.

Twenty years later Mazzini's views on Ireland had not changed, nor had his sympathy diminished. "I am feeling," he wrote, "between the unhappy and the ferocious about the Fenians condemned. To-day, I think, is the Queen's birthday. Does she read a newspaper? Cannot she find a womanly feeling in her heart and ask the Cabinet to commute punishment? In point of fact the killing of these men will prove an absolute fault [sic]. Burke will be the Robert Emmet of 1867. A feeling of revenge will rekindle the energy of the discouraged Fenians. The dream will become, through martyrdom, a sort of religion. But that is not my ground. It is the legal murder re-enacted against a *thought*, a thought which ought to be refuted, destroyed by thought only. Burke and others are genuine believers in Irish nationality. I think they are philosophically and politically wrong; but are we to refute a philosophical error with hanging?"

After their reprieve he wrote, "You have been spared the infamy of Burke's execution. I am glad of it; I have a weakness for England and did not like the shame for her."

It would be easy to dismiss Mazzini's remarks with the statement that history has proved them mistaken. That indeed is substantially true. But none the less Mazzini's words are enlightening. He distrusts the reality of Nationalism in Ireland on the two grounds which in Ireland are commonly held to be its most distinctive qualities, its endurance and its mission. The former conclusion is deduced from purely contemporary and therefore transient conditions. Mazzini surveys the Ireland of the post-famine years, an Ireland depressed and divided whose resources spiritual as well as material are diminished by the steady drain of emigration. But the latter—the condemnation of Irish nationalism by one of the greatest of nationalist thinkers—cannot be so lightly dismissed. Why did Mazzini decline to see any elements of true nationality in the

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Irish Movement? Was he justified in claiming that the Irish people did not stand for "any distinct principle of life?" And if this contention be admitted, was he right in denying the reality of nationality on this ground alone?

The answer to all these questions is implicit in Mazzini's political philosophy, a philosophy whose principles cannot too often be recalled in this age which has neglected to its cost the distinction between true and false nationality.<sup>1</sup> The duty of man, duty to the State, and duty to the world was the foundation of Mazzini's thought. Nationality exists as the means whereby the individual in serving his country may serve humanity. "Nationality," he wrote, "is sacred to me because I see in it the instrument of labour for the good and progress of all men." And again, "Countries are the workshops of humanity: a nation is a living task, her life is not her own, but a force and a function in the universal providential scheme."

What then are the essential marks of nationality? Mazzini disposed of the argument that race is the true basis of nationality. There is not a single spot in Europe where an unmixed race can be detected. "France, the most powerful nationality of the modern world is a mixture of Germans, Celts, Romans." He recognized the influence of geography, "nationalities appear to me to have been traced long ago by the finger of Providence on the map of Europe"; and he noted with pardonable satisfaction that Italy has "her sublime, irrefutable boundary marks." But he was too clear-sighted to regard a transcendental interpretation of geography as the final definition of nationality. Geography, history, race and language might have a formative influence on nationality, but they did not in themselves constitute its true foundation. That was to be found "in the will of the people" who desire to be

<sup>1</sup> A valuable survey of his Political Thought will be found in Bolton King, *Mazzini* and in C. E. Vaughan *Studies in the History of Political Philosophy* (Manchester, 1925). Mazzini's best known works on this subject are *Thoughts on Democracy* and *The Duties of Man*.

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a nation; and *provided* that behind the desire there lies a moral purpose then they have a right to be one. Mazzini was not alone in maintaining that nationality must have a democratic basis—the will of the people—but he was the first to claim that this basis is insufficient unless there is a moral aim to justify it. “In questions of nationality, as in every other question, the end alone is sovereign”; and a true nation must have a moral intention, its clear and understood mission to accomplish for itself and humanity. The struggle of a community for a selfish materialistic end is not consistent with the principle of nationality. For the moral end is supreme; and it is only in homage to the moral law that a nation finds its “baptism and consecration.” “National life and international life should be two manifestations of the same principle, the love of good.”

Even this brief summary of the distinctive principles of Mazzini's thought on Nationality explains the ground on which he withheld his benediction from the Irish national movement. He could detect in it no distinct principle of life nor any high “special function” which Ireland should fulfil in the interests of humanity. Now Mazzini's principle that nationality has a moral function to fulfil deserves every emphasis; and only too often, in Ireland, as in other nations, the purpose of nationality was forgotten in the immediate struggle for independence. Thomas Davis had seen the danger, and it may well be that the historian of our time will attribute many of the troubles of to-day to the neglect of the wider view.

But when Mazzini elaborates his principle of the moral purpose of nationality in order to propound a theory that every nation has a distinct and recognizable service to render to humanity then he is on very uncertain ground. It is all very well to write in general terms, “Special interests, special aptitudes, and before all special functions, a special mission to fulfil, seem to me the true, infallible characteristic of nationalities,” but to descend to a particular definition of these “missions” is a thankless task indeed. Mazzini, with characteristic

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courage, attempted it. England's function was "industry and colonies," Russia's "the civilization of Asia," Poland's "the Slav initiative," Germany's distinctive characteristic was "thought," France's was action, Italy's thought in union with action. "While the German walks the earth with his sight lost in the depths of heaven, and the Frenchman's eye rarely looks aloft but scours the earth's surface with its restless penetrating glance, the Genius that guards the destinies of Italy has ever been wont to pass swiftly from the ideal to real, seeking from old how earth and heaven may be joined together." To-day one would hardly describe the "missions" and characteristics of the nations in just these words. The Soviet might indeed be gratified to learn that the "civilization of Asia" was its appointed task, but Il Duce, nauseated by "the putrefying corpse of liberty"<sup>1</sup> appears to emphasize rather different aspects of Italian character and the Führer has displayed an unmistakable aversion to the "German who walks with his sight lost in the depths of heaven." Time changes so much of what might at one moment appear to be a fundamental racial characteristic, that the belief in a special mission pushed beyond a certain point becomes absurd. Signor Croce writing<sup>2</sup> of the "missions" assigned to Italy after 1870 declares that "nations like individuals have no other mission than that of living their lives as human beings, that is as idealists, acting in accordance with the traditions and opportunities which present themselves." For it is clear that a belief in the "mission" of a nation can be no more than a myth, and like all myths it will sometimes point in the right direction and sometimes in the wrong; at times it will encourage, at times it will discourage; on some occasions it will do good, and on others it will do harm. But it has no historical reality. That is not to say that nations have no distinctive contribution to make, but that such contributions are incidental and indefinable.

<sup>1</sup> These are his own words.

<sup>2</sup> *Italy, 1870-1915*, p. 4, Oxford, 1929.

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It may be concluded therefore that Mazzini tested Irish nationalism by a standard of no historical validity. Moreover, if the recognition of "some high special function" is the final condition of true nationality, then Mazzini judged Irish Nationalism by a standard that has not been asked of any other nation.

But because Mazzini's particular analysis of Irish nationalism is deduced from mistaken premises it must not be assumed that he has nothing worth while to teach. On the contrary he recalls to our minds three essential characteristics of true nationality. To-day the world cannot be too often reminded that nationality is not an end in itself, but that its justification is to be found only in the moral purpose which it fulfils. It were well indeed for Irishmen to remember this at a time when the control of Irish destinies lies once more in their own hands.

Even more pertinent is Mazzini's reminder that a nation cannot live to itself alone. Humanity is one, and all the nations owe a duty to it. "There exists in Europe a harmony of needs and wishes, a common thought, a universal mind, which directs the nations by convergent paths to the same goal." A nation that stands aloof is a selfish nation; a patriotism that despises other countries is a poor counterfeit patriotism; a nation that lives to itself alone forgets the moral foundation of its nationality. It is a fitting reminder to-day, when a contempt for all things "foreign" is in danger of being regarded as the hall-mark of patriotism, when men strangely unmindful of Ireland's European tradition, dating from noble contributions to the culture and religion of the Europe of the Dark Ages, hail cultural and political isolation as the pathway to national salvation.

Finally, there is Mazzini's doctrine that "nationality can be founded only for and upon and by the people." Nationality must be democratic. Consequently the expansion of a nation at the cost of others is but a perversion of true nationalism. "I

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hate the monopolist usurping nation that sees its own strength only in the weakness and poverty of others. It is a poor stunted people whose foreign policy is one of aggrandisement and selfishness whether it seeks them basely or buys glory at other persons' expense."

But Europe has long since forgotten the idealism that adorned the heroic age of national movement, as it has neglected the distinction so rightly drawn between true and false nationality.

The significance of Mazzini's political teaching cannot blind us to the defect of his doctrinaire outlook. He was single-minded with the blighting single-mindedness of the fanatic. His verdict on Ireland is but one instance of that lack of imaginative sympathy which ultimately made co-operation with his Italian compatriots impossible. But it were wrong indeed to think that "the pale, frail Genoese whose face was scarred with the sorrows of his country" had no message for a nation that after long adversity has regained her freedom. So to conclude I have selected three aphorisms from his writings not inappropriate, as I think, to our time and circumstance.

Where the citizen does not know that he must give lustre to his country, not borrow lustre from it, that country may be strong but never happy.

Flattery will never save a country, nor proud words make us less abject.

The honour of a country depends much more upon removing its faults than on boasting of its qualities.

### CHAPTER III

## *The Communist International and the Irish Question*

"The voice I heard was the voice of all generations  
Acclaiming new faiths, horrible, beautiful faiths "

DOROTHY WELLESLEY ON LENIN

WHAT official Ireland thinks of Karl Marx and the Communist International can scarcely have escaped the attention of any citizen, for leaders of every shade of opinion who are in accord on no other topic agree in their denunciation of Communism. But what Marx and other communists have thought of Ireland is virtually unknown. Yet both Marx and Engels were interested in the Irish Question and their attitude towards it is brought out in some detail in the Marx-Engels correspondence and to a lesser extent in Marx's letters to Dr. Kugelmann, both of which have recently been translated into English. The publication of the correspondence under the auspices of the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute was approved by Lenin. "In this correspondence," he wrote, "it is not merely that Marx and Engels here stand out before the reader in striking relief and in all their greatness. The extremely rich theoretical content of Marxism also is unfolded most vividly" since in these letters "Marx and Engels prompted by the most diverse occurrences in various countries, at different historical moments would discuss what was most fundamental in the formulation of questions concerning the *political* tasks of the working-class."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Marx-Engels, Selected Correspondence, 1846-95*; first published in English, 1934; *Letters from Marx to Dr. Kugelmann*; first published in English, 1834.

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One of the "various countries" whose politics are interpreted in the light of the Marxist dialectic is Ireland.

It has been justly observed that no work on Marx can expect to be received with anywhere near the same detachment as a book on the Ammassalik Eskimo or a treatise on the internal constitution of the stars; and even though this is not a book but a chapter, I realize that it is not easy to present the reader with a statement unbiased in every respect. For though Marx and Engels had no decisive influence on events during their lifetime, to-day they are the acknowledged prophets of a creed which confronts the established order of society with the most uncompromising challenge in history. In consequence their personalities and their writings are distorted in violent and bitter controversy. None the less the opinions of Marx and Engels on the Ireland of more than half a century ago deserve to be better known, if only because they impress one with the importance of placing the economic motive in Irish history in proper perspective. In these letters the fluctuations and development in opinion appear, though always such as lie within the rigid Marxist framework and doubtful points are discussed with more candour than in those articles on Ireland<sup>1</sup> which Marx contributed to the *American Press*. The letters define in detail the Marxist interpretation of Irish politics.

### THE MARXIST APPROACH TO IRELAND

An extract from Engels will provide us with a text. He wrote:

It was seen that *all* past history, with the exception of its primitive stages, was the history of class struggles: that these warring classes of society are always the products of the modes of production and exchange—in a word of the economic conditions of their time; that the economic structure of society always furnishes the real basis, starting from which we can alone work out the ultimate explanation of the whole juridical



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and political institutions as well as of the religious, philosophical, and other ideas of a given historical period.

According to Marx and Engels the discovery of this principle showed that the coming of Socialism was inevitable. It was "the necessary outcome of a struggle between historically developed classes—the proletariat and the bourgeoisie." As the character of the struggle was predetermined, so also it had its logical inevitable outcome in the victory of the proletariat. Admittedly capitalists may for a time secure partial victories, but the Marxist assumption is that despite such set-backs, the establishment of the Communist society is the ultimate certainty. For this reason politics must be regarded as a manifestation of the conflict of classes. That alone is fundamental, unchanging.

It was with the eyes of protagonists in the conflict that Marx and Engels regarded Ireland. Their interest was fostered by two considerations, the one of particular, and the other of general, application. The former was inspired by a belief that Irish discontents might be used as a lever to overthrow the strongly entrenched capitalist system in Great Britain and the latter by the recognition that proletarians must learn to unite first nationally before they can hope to act internationally. Marx argued that a series of conflicts such as those which occurred in Paris in the early months of 1848 would progressively weaken the bourgeoisie and so hasten the day of the Communist triumph. It was therefore the duty of Communists to organize national revolution in order to prepare for later international working-class co-operation, and they could fulfil this task with the comforting assurance that the logic of history had predetermined the triumph of their cause. This was just as well for their peace of mind because in fact they were paving the way for Hitler as surely as for Lenin.

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### MARX, NATIONALITY AND THE CLASS WAR

Marx, though without sympathy for nationalist aspirations, considered that at times they might be turned to advantage. In his letters there happens to be no direct reference to Irish nationality, but his opinion is made clear enough in a commentary upon the revolutions of 1848. His under-estimate of the strength of the national movement is remarkable. He wrote:

Thus ended for the present, and most likely for ever, the attempts of the Slavonians in Germany to recover an independent national existence. Scattered remnants of numerous nations, whose nationality and political vitality had long been extinguished, and who in consequence had been obliged, for almost a thousand years, to follow in the wake of a mightier nation, their conqueror, the same as the Welsh in England, the Basques in Spain . . . these dying nationalities, the Bohemians, Carinthians, Dalmatians, etc., had tried to profit by the universal confusion of 1848 to restore their political status quo of A.D. 800. The history of a thousand years ought to have shown them that such retrogression is impossible; that if all the territory east of the Elbe and Saale had at one time been occupied by kindred Slavonians, this fact merely proved the historical tendency, and at the same time the physical and intellectual power of the German nation to subdue, absorb and assimilate its ancient eastern neighbours: that this tendency on the part of these Germans had always been and still was one of the mightiest ways by which the civilization of Western Europe had been spread in the east of that continent . . . and that therefore the natural and inevitable fate of these dying nations was to allow this process of dissolution and absorption by their stronger neighbours to complete itself. Certainly this is no very flattering prospect for pluralistic dreamers . . . but can they expect that history would retrograde a thousand years in order to please a few phthisical bodies of men . . . ?

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Though Irishmen are not specifically numbered among the "pluralistic dreamers" it may reasonably be deduced from this condemnation of Panslavism that the principle of Irish nationality aroused no sympathy in Marx—a conclusion which his letters on Ireland by implication confirm. A belief in the economic interpretation of history in any event relegates nationality, as indeed religion, to the level of a secondary or superficial phenomenon.<sup>1</sup>

The Marxist creed of the class war inevitably fosters a spirit of hatred. Socialists like Robert Owen in England and Saint Simon had aspired to reform the evils of capitalism by an appeal to man's benevolence. But Marx—and it should be remembered to his credit—believed that such dependence on man's sense of justice was futile. Consequently, if the need for a radical change in the economic structure of society be once admitted, then as a realist he was driven to conclude that such reform could be inaugurated only by the ruthless application of revolutionary methods. But the sympathy one might feel for a man irresistibly impelled by logic to an unwelcome conclusion is sensibly diminished by the belief that the doctrine of class war was by no means repellent to his nature. For Marx, it must be confessed, was an unpleasant colleague. Bitter, unforgiving, autocratic, insanely jealous, he repels one far more by the treatment of fellow Communists as Bakunin, than by unrelenting hostility to outside opposition. The editor of the Marx-Engels correspondence refers with pride to the letters dealing with the strategy and tactics of the proletarian party, since they show how "Marx and Engels fought for and carried through the policy of revolutionary Marxism, a thoroughgoing series of characteristic examples of their struggles against all varieties of opportunism and class conciliation, examples of the fight on two fronts." It is a hard

<sup>1</sup> Bertrand Russell gives an excellent critical account of Marxist thought in *Freedom and Organization*, pp. 218–253. London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1937.

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creed that condemns the orthodox to believe that class-conciliation is crime; it is absurd for him who sows the seeds of hate to hope to garner a harvest of fraternal love.

### ENGELS ON IRELAND

Friedrich Engels had been converted to Communism before he met Marx. Hess gives the following account of his conversion: "Engels came to see me on his way from Berlin. We discussed the questions of the day, and he, a revolutionist of the Year One, parted from me a convinced Communist. Thus did I spread devastation."<sup>1</sup> Engels' comments on Ireland are vivacious and pointed. A long letter to Marx giving an account of Irish conditions is of sufficient interest to quote.

### ENGELS TO MARX

Manchester, 23 May, 1856.

In our tour in Ireland we came from Dublin to Galway on the west coast, then twenty miles north inland, then to Limerick, down the Shannon to Tarbert, Tralee, Killarney and back to Dublin. A total of about four to five hundred English miles in the country itself, so that we have seen about two-thirds of the whole country. With the exception of Dublin, which bears the same relation to London as Düsseldorf does to Berlin and has quite the character of a small one-time capital, all English-built too, the whole country, and especially the towns, has exactly the appearance of France or Northern Italy. Gendarmes, priests, lawyers, bureaucrats, squires in pleasant profusion and a total absence of any and every industry, so that it would be difficult to understand what all these parasitic growths found to live on if the misery of the peasants did not supply the other half of the picture. "Strong measures" are visible in every corner of the country, the Government meddles with everything, of so-called self-government there is not a trace. Ireland may be regarded as

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Bertrand Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

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the first English colony and as one which, because of its proximity, is still governed exactly in the old way, and here one can already observe that the so-called liberty of English citizens is based on the oppression of the colonies. I have never seen so many gendarmes in any country, and the drink-sodden expression of the Prussian gendarme is developed to its highest perfection here among the constabulary, who are armed with carbines, bayonets and handcuffs.

Characteristic of this country are its ruins, the oldest from the fifth and sixth centuries, the latest from the nineteenth—with every intervening period. The most ancient are all churches; after 1100, churches and castles; after 1800 the houses of peasants. The whole of the west, but especially in the neighbourhood of Galway, is covered with these ruined peasant houses, most of which have only been deserted since 1846. I never thought that famine could have such tangible reality. Whole villages are devastated, and there among them lie the splendid parks of the lesser landlords, who are almost the only people still living there, mostly lawyers. Famine, emigration and clearances, together have accomplished this. There are not even cattle to be seen in the fields. The land is an utter desert which nobody wants. In County Clare, south of Galway, it is rather better, here there are at least some cattle, and the hills toward Limerick are excellently cultivated, mostly by Scottish farmers, the ruins have been cleared away and the country has a bourgeois appearance. In the southwest there are a lot of mountains and bogs but also wonderfully rich forest growth, beyond that again fine pastures, especially in Tipperary, and towards Dublin land which is, one can see, gradually coming into the hands of big farmers.

The country has been completely ruined by the English wars of conquest from 1100 to 1850 (for in reality both the wars and the state of siege lasted as long as that). It is a fact that most of the ruins were produced by destruction during the wars. The people itself has got its peculiar character from this, and despite all their Irish nationalist fanaticism the fellows feel that they are no longer at home in their own country. Ireland for the Saxon! That is now being realized.

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The Irishman knows he cannot compete with the Englishman, who comes with means in every respect superior; emigration will go on until the predominantly, indeed almost exclusively Celtic character of the population is all to hell. How often have the Irish started to try and achieve something, and every time they have been crushed, politically and industrially! By consistent oppression they have been artificially converted into an utterly demoralized nation and now fulfil the notorious function of supplying England, America, Australia, etc., with prostitutes, casual labourers, pimps, thieves, swindlers, beggars and other rabble. This demoralized character persists in the aristocracy too. The landowners, who everywhere else have taken on bourgeois qualities, are here completely demoralized. Their country seats are surrounded by enormous, wonderfully beautiful parks, but all around is waste land, and where the money is supposed to come from it is impossible to see. These fellows ought to be shot. Of mixed blood, mostly tall, strong, handsome chaps, they all wear enormous moustaches under colossal Roman noses, give themselves the sham military airs of retired colonels, travel around the country after all sorts of pleasures, and if one makes an inquiry, they haven't a penny, are laden with debts, and live in dread of the Encumbered Estates Court.

How far is this letter a description, how far a caricature of the Ireland of 1856? It is not easy to determine; though it is clear that Engels paints conditions at their worst in order to contrast the ills of the present with the blessings of the Marxist society of the future. In the Ireland which he visited he found material enough for his purpose in the misery of the post-famine years. But many of the observations though not without foundation were marked by the over-emphasis which converts them into caricature.

### MARX ON ANGLO-IRISH POLITICS

If the commentary of Engels is mainly descriptive that of Marx is confined to an interpretation of the *politics* of the Irish

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question. His opinion did not remain static. He wrote to Engels in 1867 to say that he no longer believed as hitherto that the separation of Ireland from England was impossible. This change of view was induced by the new direction of British policy in Ireland.

What the English do not yet know is that since 1846 the economic content and therefore also the political aim of English domination have entered into an entirely new phase, and that precisely because of this, Fenianism is characterized by a socialistic tendency (in a negative sense, directed against the appropriation of the soil) and by the fact that it is a lower orders movement. What can be more ridiculous than to confuse the barbarities of Elizabeth or Cromwell—who wanted to supplant the Irish by English colonists (in the Roman sense)—with the present system, which wants to supplement them with sheep, oxen and pigs. The system of 1801-46, with its rack rents and its middlemen, collapsed. Hence from then onwards systematic consolidation of farms. The Encumbered Estates Act, which turned a mass of previously enriched middlemen into landlords, hastened the process. The *clearing of the estate* of Ireland is now the one idea of English rule in Ireland. The *stupid* English Government in London itself knows nothing, of course, of this immense change since 1846. But the Irish know it.<sup>1</sup>

Rather earlier he had illustrated his argument by referring to the number and the form of the evictions. He wrote to Engels:

The Irish Viceroy, Lord Abicorne (this is roughly the name),<sup>2</sup> has "cleared" his estate of thousands within recent weeks by forcible executions. Among the evicted are well-to-do farmers, whose improvements and capital investments are confiscated in this fashion. This form of expropriation is known elsewhere since the Prussians in West Prussia buy land and the Russians confiscate only for political reasons.

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated November 30, 1867.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Abercorn, letter dated November 2, 1867.

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Because of the change in land policy, whose general application he over-estimates, Marx concludes that separation is now inevitable, although after separation there may come federation.

But the issue that interests Marx and Engels is not the future government of Ireland but the policy to be pursued by the English workers. How are they to turn the Irish question to the ultimate advantage of the proletariat? Marx replies:

In my opinion they (the English workers) must make the *repeal of the Union* an article of their *pronunziamento*. This is the only *legal* and therefore the only possible form of Irish emancipation which can be admitted in the programme of an *English Party*. Experience must show later whether a purely personal union can continue to subsist between the two countries. I half think it can, if it takes place in time.

He then proceeded to draft a programme of reform for Ireland which was to be carried through with the assistance of the English working class. The three points in this programme were:

- (1) Self-government for Ireland.
- (2) An agrarian revolution. "With the best will in the world the English cannot accomplish this for them, but they can give them the legal means of doing it for themselves."
- (3) *Protective tariffs against England.*

It was scarcely a programme likely to arouse enthusiasm in the English working classes. But in 1867 Marx still believed that the ascendancy class in Ireland could be overthrown by the efforts of the English working class. Two years later he realized his mistake. The English working class was probably unable, and certainly unwilling to undertake such a task.

Engels in the course of his travels in Ireland seems by a rather different process of thought to have reached a conclusion identical with that of Marx. They both disapproved of the outrages and agrarian murders in Ireland. While Marx was active in promoting agitation for the release of the Fenian prisoners, he expressly condemned "terrorist" manifestations



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as the blowing up of Clerkenwell prison on the ground that it was bad policy: Engels describes the movement "in the first place violent and in second place anti-English" as something "unheard of in English conditions and really amazing" and his revolutionary expectations were heightened by the sympathy manifested for the Fenians by some of the London proletariat. But he was outspoken in his denunciation of the "Bakunistic, braggart, aimless propaganda through action" and insisted that Communism should not be made responsible for such "donkey tricks."<sup>1</sup>

The concern of Marx and Engels with the Irish Question depended upon a belief that events in Ireland might at the last assist, and indeed might even occasion the outbreak of the general social revolution for whose coming they worked so hard. It was therefore a matter of cardinal importance that the working classes in England and in Ireland should be united in a bond of sympathy. But the task presented exceptional difficulties and indeed provides a practical illustration of one of the weak links in the Marxist argument. It is easy to proclaim with the Communist Manifesto, "Proletarians of all nations, unite!" it is not difficult to produce valid reasons why they should unite, but it is an illusion to suppose, as Marx supposed, that the self-interest of the proletariat is a force sufficient to override the historic sentiment of nationality. That sentiment, amounting in this particular instance to a deep-rooted prejudice, eliminated the possibility that the English working-class would assist the cause of Irish independence. As early as 1856 Engels realized how profound was the aversion of the English industrial worker for Irish competitors with their lower standards of living. Later Engels was to meet this distaste even on the Council of the International. There he was enabled to defeat a proposal to subject the Irish sections to a British Federal Council only in the teeth of violent opposition.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vide Gustav Mayer's *Life of Friedrich Engels*, p. 191. London, 1936.

<sup>2</sup> Vide, *ibid.*

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Meanwhile Marx was learning something of the difficulties of Anglo-Irish working-class unity. But he remained insistent that union must be achieved if the capitalist régime in the United Kingdom was to be overthrown. In 1869 he wrote: "Every one of the movements of the English proletariat is crippled by the disunion with the Irish, who form a very important section of the working class in England."<sup>1</sup> But while Marx acknowledged the antagonism between the English and Irish working classes and while he acknowledged that "the revolutionary fire of the Celtic workers does not harmonize with the restrained force but slowness of the Anglo-Saxons,"<sup>2</sup> he yet maintained that pressure of economic forces would compel them to unite. Subsequent history has revealed this calculation to be entirely inaccurate.

### IRELAND AND THE PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION

It may well be asked, why did the question of Anglo-Irish working-class relations assume such prominence in the Marx-Engels correspondence in the years immediately succeeding 1867? The answer is the enactment of the Second Reform Bill in that year, which gave the vote to the urban working classes. Engels hoped that this extension of the suffrage would lead to the rise of a revolutionary workers' party and even that revolutionary conditions would soon appear. The election of 1868 when the workers voted *en masse* for the first time proved that his hopes were utterly unfounded. His verdict on the election was "a desperate proof of the incapacity of the English proletariat" and he complained to Marx that "any parvenu swell got the votes of the workers." Engels' biographer records that he was furious at this disappointment, and adds

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Kugelmann, dated November 29th.

<sup>2</sup> From the resolution drafted in 1869 by Marx and adopted by the International Workingman's Association in 1935 in a *Handbook of Marxism!* ed. Emile Burns, pp. 194-6.

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most significantly "since the extension of the franchise did not move the English workers to independent action, the Irish question gained a new significance for Engels; and Marx's hypothesis seemed more and more attractive—that the fall of the landed oligarchy and the revival of the revolutionary spirit in England must start in and be prompted by Ireland."<sup>1</sup>

In this way we come to the final phase in the attitude of Marx and Engels to the Irish question. At the outset it was English working-class ascendancy that was to overthrow aristocratic and bourgeois ascendancy in Ireland; but after 1868 the fall of the landed oligarchy in Ireland was regarded as a stepping-stone to the outbreak of the revolutionary movement in England. Thus while the goal remained identical, the means to be employed profoundly differed. For it was recognized that the election of 1868 presented, not a chance verdict that might soon be reversed, but the deliberate choice of the English working class. Engels admitted that this class had benefited from the increase in British trade and began to fear that "in this most *bourgeois* of all nations" "a *bourgeois* aristocracy and a *bourgeois* proletariat" might one day arise "beside the existing *bourgeoisie*." But no such conditions prevailed in Ireland.

Extracts from the letters of Marx and Engels give a vivid account of the successive modifications of their Irish policy between 1867-70. On April 6, 1868, Marx wrote to Kugelman:

The Irish Question is dominant here just now. Of course it is only being exploited by Gladstone and Co. in order to get them into office, principally as an election cry for the forthcoming elections, which will be held on household suffrage. At the moment this turn of affairs is harmful for the workers' party, for the intriguers among the workers who want to get into the next Parliament, like Odger and Potter, now have a new excuse for joining with the bourgeois liberals.

On November 29, 1869, Engels in a letter to Marx, dis-

<sup>1</sup> Gustav Mayer, op. cit., p. 192.

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cussed the significance of the return of O'Donovan Rossa, the well-known Fenian prisoner at the Tipperary by-election.

The election in Tipperary is an event. It forces the Fenians out of empty conspiracy and the fabrication of small *coups* into a path of action which, even if legal in appearance, is still far more revolutionary than what they have been doing since the failure of their insurrection. In fact, they are adopting the methods of the French workers and that is an enormous advance. If only the thing is carried out as intended. The terror which this new turn has produced among the philistines, and which is now being screeched throughout the whole Liberal press, is the best proof that the nail has been hit on the head. Typical is the *Solicitors' Journal*, which remarks with horror that the election of a political prisoner is *without precedent* in the realm of Britain. So much the worse—where is there a country *except* England in which such a case is not a common event. The worthy Gladstone must be horribly annoyed.

But you really ought to look at *The Times* now. Three leaders in eight days in which either it is demanded of the Government or the Government itself demands that an end be put to the excesses of the Irish Nationalist Press.

I am very eager to hear about your debate tomorrow evening and its result, about which there can be no doubt. It would be very fine to get Odger into a hole. . . . For the rest if the English workers cannot take an example from the peasants of Tipperary they are in a bad way. . . .

The debate, to which Engels refers, appears to have been a lively affair. It arose out of a discussion on the attitude of "the British Ministry to the Irish Amnesty Question, which had taken place on November 18, 1869. On this occasion Marx made a speech "of about three-quarters of an hour, much cheered," and then proposed certain resolutions on Gladstone's Irish policy. It was resolved, *inter alia*:

that on his reply to the Irish demands for the release of the imprisoned Irish patriots—a reply contained in his letter to

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Mr. O'Shea, Mr. Gladstone deliberately insults the Irish nation;

that his whole proceedings with reference to the Irish Amnesty Question are the true and genuine offspring of that *policy of conquest* by the fiery denunciation of which Mr. Gladstone ousted his Tory colleagues from office;

that the *General Council* of the International Workingman's Association express their admiration of the spirited, firm, high-souled manner in which the Irish people carry on their Amnesty movement."

The adjourned debate on this resolution was described in a letter from Marx to Engels, dated November 26, 1869.

The meeting last Tuesday was very fiery, heated and violent. Mr. Muddlehead or whatever in the hell the fellow is called<sup>1</sup>—a Chartist and old friend of Harney's—had brought along Odger and Applegarth as a precaution. On the other side Weston and Lucraft were absent because they had gone to an Irish ball. *Reynolds* had published my resolutions in its Saturday issue, together with a summary of my speech . . . which was put right on the front page, after the first leading article. This seems to have scared the people who are making love to Gladstone. Hence the appearance of Odger and a long rambling speech from Muddershead, who got knocked on the head damned heavily by Milner (an Irishman himself). Applegarth was sitting next me and therefore did not dare to speak against the resolution, indeed he spoke *for* it, obviously with an uneasy conscience. *Odger* said that if the resolutions were forced to a vote he would be obliged to vote for them, but unanimity would surely be better, could be reached with a few small modifications, etc. To this, as *he* is the one I particularly want to put into a hole, I replied that *he* should bring forward his amendments next Tuesday! At our last meeting, although many of our most reliable members were absent, we should have got the resolution through with *only one* vote against. Next Tuesday we shall be in full force.

<sup>1</sup> Mottershead.

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Of the final discussion Marx reported to Engels December 4th:

The resolutions unanimously carried, despite Odger's persistent *verbal* amendments. I only gave way to him on one point: to omit the word "deliberate" before "insults" in paragraph one. I did this on the pretence that everything a Prime Minister did publicly must be presumed *eo ipso* to be *deliberate*. The real reason was that I knew that if once we got the essential point of paragraph one conceded all further opposition would be useless. . . . With the exception of Mottershead, who came out as John Bull, and Odger, who was as much of a diplomat as ever, the English delegates behaved splendidly.

A general debate on the relation of the English working class to the Irish question was to follow.

It may be mentioned that Marx's vindictive desire to get Odger and Applegarth "into a hole" was prompted by their moderation and natural reluctance to accept a Marxist doctrine of violence in its undiluted form. They were both leading members of the "new model" trade unionism. "Odger and Applegarth," Marx once wrote, "are both possessed with a mania for compromise and a thirst for respectability!" Yet Marx's opinions whether on colleagues or on opponents should be treated with extreme reserve. Odger, it is not perhaps unfitting to recall, appears in a more sympathetic light at a meeting as memorable as that which Marx described. The speaker was John Stuart Mill, then a candidate for Parliament, but one who displayed none of the tactful reticence expected of such persons by an English electorate. Having noted in his *Representative Government* that the Conservative Party is by the law of its composition the stupidest party, Mill observed in a pamphlet that the English working classes, though differing from those of some other countries in being ashamed of it, are yet generally liars. At a meeting chiefly composed of working classes, Mill was asked whether he had written and published this opinion. He answered at once, "I did."

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Scarcely were the words out of his mouth when vehement applause resounded through the meeting. The first working man who spoke after the incident was Odger, and as Mill records in his *Autobiography*, he said that the working classes had no desire not to be told of their faults; they wanted friends, not flatterers.<sup>1</sup>

In a letter to Kugelmann, dated November 29th, Marx explains that his support of the Fenian prisoners has other objects than that of speaking out loudly for the Irish oppressed. It is to convince the English working class that it cannot hope to overthrow the ruling classes unless and until the national demands of Ireland are conceded. This letter is an unambiguous statement of Marxist policy in Ireland.

MARX TO KUGELMANN

London, 29 November, 1869.

You will probably have seen in the *Volksstaat* the resolution against Gladstone which I proposed on the question of the Irish amnesty. I have now attacked Gladstone—and it has attracted attention here—just as I formerly attacked Palmerston. The demagogic refugees here love to fall upon the Continental despots from a safe distance. That sort of thing only attracts me when it happens *vultu instantis tyranni*.

Nevertheless both my coming out on this Irish Amnesty question and my further proposal to the General Council to discuss the relation of the English working class to Ireland and to pass resolutions on it, have of course other objects besides that of speaking out loudly and decidedly for the oppressed Irish against their oppressors.

I have become more and more convinced—and the only question is to bring this conviction home to the English working class—that it can never do anything decisive here in England until it separates its policy with regard to Ireland in the most definite way from the policy of the ruling classes, until it not only makes common cause with the Irish, but

<sup>1</sup> This account is taken from J. S. Mill, *Autobiography*, chap. vii.

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actually takes the initiative in dissolving the Union established in 1801 and replacing it by a free federal relationship. And, indeed, this must be done, not as a matter of sympathy with Ireland, but as a demand made in the interests of the English proletariat. If not, the English people will remain tied to the leading-strings of the ruling classes, because it must join with them in a common front against Ireland. Every one of its movements in England itself is crippled by the disunion with the Irish, who form a very important section of the working class in England. *The primary condition* of emancipation here—the overthrow of the English landed oligarchy—remains impossible because its position here cannot be stormed so long as it maintains its strongly entrenched outposts in Ireland. But there, once affairs are in the hands of the Irish people itself, once it is made its own legislator and ruler, once it becomes autonómous, the abolition of the landed aristocracy (to a large extent the *same persons* as the English landlords) will be infinitely easier than here, because in Ireland it is not merely a simple economic question, but at the same time a *national* question, since the landlords there are not like those in England, the traditional dignitaries and representatives, but are the mortally hated oppressors of a nation. And not only does England's internal social development remain crippled by her present relation with Ireland; her foreign policy, and particularly her policy with regard to Russia and America, suffers the same fate.

Marx develops this theme in later letters. He writes to Engels, "quite apart from all phrases about 'international' and 'humane' justice for Ireland—which are to be taken for granted on the International Council—it is in the direct and absolute interest of the English working-class to get rid of their present connection with Ireland. And this is my most complete conviction for reasons which in part I cannot tell the English workers themselves. For a long time I believed it would be possible to overthrow the Irish régime by English working-class ascendancy. I always expressed this point of view in the *New York*



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*Tribune*. Deeper study has now convinced me of the opposite. The English working class will *never accomplish anything* before it has got rid of Ireland. The lever must be applied in Ireland. That is why the Irish question is so important for the social movement in general." Furthermore, Marx detected three important factors in the contemporary Irish movement which might enhance the prospects of proletarian revolution. They were:

"(i) Opposition to lawyers and trading politicians and blarney.

(ii) Opposition to the dictates of the priests who (the *superior ones*) are traitors as in O'Connell's time.

(iii) The agricultural labouring class beginning to come out against the farming class at the last meetings."

But Engels, writing at the same time from Manchester, candidly admitted the profound distaste for the Communists' doctrine displayed in Ireland. He wrote to Marx on December 9, 1869.

. . . Ireland still remains the Holy Isle whose aspirations must on no account be mixed with the profane class struggles of the rest of the sinful world. This is no doubt partly honest madness on the part of the people, but it is equally certain that it is also partly a calculation on the side of the leaders to maintain their domination over the peasant. Added to this a nation of peasants always has to take its literary representatives from the bourgeoisie of the towns and their intelligentsia. But to these gentry the whole labour movement is pure heresy and the Irish peasant must not on any account know that the Socialist workers are his sole allies in Europe.

The final pronouncement of Marx upon the Irish Question appears in a letter to Meyer and Vogt in the United States which was dated April 9, 1870. In this letter Marx's opinions have not changed, but they have crystallized and his verdict is decided. I quote certain extracts from this letter.

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After occupying myself with the Irish Question for many years I have come to the conclusion that the decisive blow against the English ruling classes (and it will be decisive for the workers' movement all over the world) cannot be delivered *in England but only in Ireland*.

Ireland is the bulwark of the English *landed aristocracy*. The exploitation of this country is not only one of the main sources of their material wealth but it is their greatest *moral strength*. They in fact represent the domination of *England over Ireland*. Ireland is therefore the great means by which the aristocracy maintains its *domination in England* itself.

If on the other hand, the English army and police were withdrawn to-morrow, you would at once have an agrarian revolution in Ireland. But the overthrow of the English aristocracy in Ireland has as a necessary consequence its overthrow in England. And this would fulfil the prerequisite for the proletarian revolution in England.

The destruction of the landed aristocracy in Ireland is an infinitely easier operation than in England itself because the land question has hitherto been the exclusive form of the social question in Ireland, because it is a question of existence, *of life and death*, for the immense majority of the Irish people, and because it is at the same time inseparable from the *national* question. Quite apart from the passionate character of the Irish and the fact that they are more revolutionary than the English.

. . . England now possesses a working class *divided* into two *hostile* camps—English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of living. In relation to the Irish worker he feels himself a member of the *ruling* nation and so turns himself into a tool of the aristocrats and capitalists *against Ireland*, thus strengthening their domination over *himself*. The Irishman pays him back with interest in his own coin. He regards the English worker as both sharing in the guilt of English domination in Ireland and at the same time serving as its stupid tool. The antagonism is artificially kept

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alive by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes. It is the secret of the impotence of the English working class despite their organization. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power.

. . . to hasten the social revolution in England is the most important object of the International Workingman's Association. The sole means of hastening it is to make Ireland independent. Hence the task of the International is everywhere to put the conflict between England and Ireland in the foreground, and everywhere to side openly with Ireland. The special task of the Central Council in London is to awaken a consciousness in the English workers that *the national Emancipation of Ireland* is no question of abstract justice or human sympathy but the first condition of *their own emancipation*.

### SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE MARXIST INTERPRETATION OF THE IRISH QUESTION

If one accepts without qualification the assumptions of dialectical materialism, then the nature of the conclusions to be deduced from any particular political questions are predetermined. If the materialist conception of history is true, if as Engels said in a classic definition of that conception, "the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought not in men's brains, not in man's better insight into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange," and if that is to say these "final causes are to be sought not in the *philosophy* but in the *economics* of each particular epoch," then one is bound to conclude that political motive forces are no more than a superficial manifestation of a fundamental economic struggle. Marx and Engels interpreted the forces at work in the Ireland of their day in accordance with this presumption. They assumed that "political" and "religious" controversies, however acute they might

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appear, were in fact not fundamental. So it was that questions that loomed large in the eyes of contemporary politicians were ignored in the Communist commentary.

The truth of the Marxist interpretation of Irish history depends in the last analysis upon the validity of the materialist conception of history. But that is not to say that there is nothing to be learnt from a critical survey of the Marxist approach to a particular problem. On the contrary such an examination provides a valuable criterion by which to judge the validity of the Marxist assumptions as a whole. Moreover, it may be suggested that Ireland, because of the complex forces which have moulded its history, and because of the highly particularized character of its politics, does furnish a subject of more than ordinary interest. The merit of the Marxist approach may be tested by question: to what extent has the Marxist analysis of Irish politics or of Anglo-Irish relations proved accurate?

It may be acknowledged that the letters of Marx provide a much needed corrective to the dominant school of Irish history. The emphasis that has been placed upon political history in nineteenth-century form has only too frequently resulted in a neglect of underlying causes. In this way the economic motive has been ignored almost entirely, whereas in fact such a motive has played a highly significant though not, as I think, decisive rôle in Irish history since the Union. Marx was misled by his conviction that economic conflicts are always conflicts between classes, whereas frequently they are between nations or political groups. It is true that there was a possibility in the years following the Famine that Irish nationalism might be diverted to a struggle for economic power, but its realization was averted by the emergence of the Ulster Question in its most acute form. Thenceforward a distinct economic motive force animated, though it did not inspire, Ulster's resistance to Home Rule. So it was that the economic causation of political events in pre-war Ireland

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operated within its limited sphere of influence, as a force dividing the nation, not horizontally into classes as the disciple of dialectical materialism would expect, but vertically into groups. This exposes the fallacy of the Marxist dogma that economic conflicts are invariably class conflicts.<sup>1</sup> But it does not diminish the need for a clear study of the economic motive in Irish history.

The limitations of the Marxist commentary become more apparent when Marx's Irish policy is considered. Subsequent history has shown his analysis to be mistaken alike in principle and in detail. Thus he understood the significance of the land question, pointing out quite rightly "that it had hitherto been the exclusive form of the social question in Ireland," but deduced from this fact the mistaken conclusion that the "land question was inseparable from the national question." In fact the virtual solution of the land question by Wyndham's Act in 1937 proved but the prelude to a decisive forward movement in national sentiment. It is clear, therefore, that the land question was in no sense an integral part of the nationalist movement, though at times this economic motive force adds substance to its claims.

Marx, in other words, made a miscalculation similar to that of Balfour when he planned to "kill Home Rule by kindness." They both started from the assumption that Ireland's discontents were derived from an economic source, and history has shown the Marxist analysis and conservative statesmanship alike to be inadequate.

The antipathy between the English and Irish working classes is well known, but it is an illusion to suppose, as Marx and Engels supposed, that every one of the movements of the English working class "was crippled by disunion with the Irish," and that the "English working class will never accomplish anything until it gets rid of the Irish." In fact such a

<sup>1</sup> Cf. my book, *The Government of Northern Ireland*, chap. x. London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1936.

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division has its own importance, but to use it to explain the reluctance of English and Irish working classes to adopt a revolutionary programme is *prima facie* absurd. It is a more serious criticism of the Marxist analysis that it should ignore the problem of Ulster. Because the division between North and South, between Protestant and Catholic, between Orangeman and Nationalist was not a class division Marx regarded the whole question as superficial. Dialectical materialism conceived that the final causes of all *political* revolutions are to be found in the *economics* of each particular epoch. But the Ulster question is not susceptible of an *economic* explanation. It is true that on occasions, as when great emphasis was placed on the issue of fiscal independence at the National Convention in 1917, economic jealousy between North and South did play a distinct and not insignificant part. But it was never a directing force. And it is vital to recall that this economic conflict was in no sense a class conflict, but was an indication of the more fundamental, social, religious and racial differences dividing the North from the South. There has been, and to this day there exists as between Northern Ireland and Eire an external economic conflict of limited dimensions, but there is not and there has not been an internal class conflict of such importance as might tend to override the traditional sectarian strife in the North. So Marx was mistaken not merely in the assumption that economic conflicts are always class conflicts, but also in the belief that economic motives were of more fundamental significance than political, national or religious sentiment. Even though the Ulster Question did not assume its most intransigent character until after the First Home Rule Bill of 1886, no one save a theorist observing Ireland from the narrow window of rigid dogma could have overlooked its potential significance.

Marx confines himself in these letters to a single reference to Ulster, remarking in a letter dated April 6, 1868, to Dr. Kugelmann that:

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once the Irish Church is dead, the Protestant Irish tenants in the province of Ulster will unite with the Catholic tenants in the three other provinces of Ireland and join their movement, whereas up to the present landlordism has been able to exploit this religious hostility.

The Irish policy which Marx recommended to the International is a notable expression of his failure to understand the relative strength of the forces which were to mould the future course of Anglo-Irish relations. In a Resolution drafted in 1869 Marx enunciated his Irish policy in its final form. He wrote:

If England is the fortress of European landlordism and capitalism, then the point at which a strong blow can be struck at official England is *Ireland*. . . .

In this way the viewpoint of the International Working Man's Association is very clear. Its first task is the speeding on of the Social Revolution in England. For this end the decisive blow must be struck in Ireland.

The essential preliminary condition of the Emancipation of the English Working Class is the turning of the present compulsory Union, that is slavery, of Ireland with England into an *equal and free union*, if that is possible, or into *full separation* if that is inevitable.<sup>1</sup>

This policy is the theme of all the later Marxist correspondence on Ireland. The English social system was most vulnerable in Ireland, therefore it would be sound strategy to attack it at its weakest point, and if that attack were successful then the collapse of the ruling class in England must soon follow. The Marxist hypothesis—that the overthrow of the landed oligarchy and the revival of the revolutionary spirit in England must start in and be prompted by Ireland—was inspired by the belief that the revolutionary movement in Ireland was but

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Emile Burns, *op. cit.*, pp. 195-6. This resolution was approved by the International Workingman's Association in 1869.

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a particular manifestation of the universal class war. Engels might observe that "Ireland still remained the Holy Isle whose aspirations must on no account be mixed up with the profane class struggles of the rest of the sinful world," but any misgivings as to the truth of the Marxist interpretation were silenced by allusions to "honest madness" or the wiles of "capitalist intellectuals." But in fact it was true that Ireland, or to be more precise the politically conscious minority in Ireland, was willing to sacrifice even her economic prosperity in order to realize her national aspirations. Nationalist sentiment was the fundamental motive force. In other words the Irish Question was, as Marx never understood, a *political* question. From this miscalculation springs his curious misconception as to the extent to which the English social system would be affected by the overthrow of the landed oligarchy in Ireland. To-day the Anglo-Irish aristocrats, whom Engels so happily caricatured, the "tall handsome men with their enormous moustaches under colossal Roman noses" with their sham military airs, their pleasures and their debts, live no longer in their country seats surrounded by "wonderfully beautiful parks." To-day the Irish landlords are no more than a memory in the land whose destinies they once controlled, their system of government has been replaced by a national government enjoying a political freedom greater than that which Marx anticipated; and yet the day of social revolution in England has been neither hastened nor delayed in any material respect by those events in Irish history.

In what way then was Marx's reasoning at fault? He had always maintained with perfect justice that the overthrow of the landed aristocracy would be infinitely easier in Ireland than in England "because in Ireland it is not merely a simple economic question," but at the same time a *national* question, since the landlords are not like those in England the traditional dignitaries and representatives, "but the mortally hated oppressors of a nation." The verdict recalls that of Count Cavour:



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"These two aristocracies have assuredly no more in common than a sound and vigorous arm has with its fellow which gangrene has blighted." And since on Marx's own admission the relation between the aristocracy and the other classes in Ireland differed so profoundly from the relations between the aristocracy and the other classes in England, what reasons were there to suppose that the fate of the former should materially affect the fortunes of the latter? Further, might it not be argued that the destruction of the Irish landlords strengthen the position of the English aristocracy by ending an unpopular association—by cutting off the limb that was diseased? But in any event it is clear that Marx's conclusion, derived from a determined application of the theory of class war to Anglo-Irish relations, in defiance of all the historical evidence at his disposal, was mistaken because he failed to realize the dominantly political character of the Irish Question.

Hitherto no distinction has been drawn between the attitude of Marx and that of Engels to Ireland, since their policy is in all vital respects identical. But the evidence of the letters alone would suggest that Engels understood Ireland and the character of its people to an extent to which Marx could not pretend. Engels' comments are direct, critical, outspoken, but they betray a genuine interest in Irish affairs. Where Marx writes only of the use that can be made of Ireland for furthering the work of the proletarian revolution, Engels, though equally devoted to that Communist ideal, does not regard Ireland and her aspirations with the same cold-blooded detachment. His descriptions of the countryside, though fanciful at times, are not lacking in insight. This interest was encouraged by the two Irish women whom he loved. He planned a history of Ireland, and papers which were found after his death showed that he had completed some parts of it. He considered that Ireland's "ill luck" began millions of years ago, when the island's coal deposits were washed away, and she was condemned "as if by Nature's decree" to be a farming country

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situated beside a great industrial land. He asked himself, too, the ever-recurring question, was Ireland destined by its climate for agriculture or cattle-rearing or both? Engels argued in favour of a balanced farming system; compared with England, Ireland is more suitable for cattle-rearing, but compared with France England is the more suitable. Are we to conclude that the whole of England should be changed into cattle ranches, and the whole of the agricultural population sent into the factory towns or shipped to America (except for a few cattle ranchers) to make room for cattle which are to be sent to France in exchange for silks and wines? With such analogies Engels condemns the English policy which had led to the depopulation of Ireland. His affection for Ireland is expressed in his description of the Irish climate; "the weather, like the inhabitants, is full of violent contrast; the sky is like an Irish woman's face, rain and sunshine succeed each other suddenly and unexpectedly, and there is none of the humdrum greyness of England."<sup>1</sup> But theoretic preconceptions, not actual observation of conditions, determined the character of Marxist policy.

### THE VERDICT OF LENIN

Lenin wrote in February 1914:

The policy of Marx and Engels on the Irish Question represented a model—which preserves its enormous *practical* significance to this day—of what the attitude of the proletariat in oppressing nations towards national movements should be and it represented a warning against that "servile haste" with which the petty bourgeoisie of all countries, of all colours and languages, hasten to declare, that the alteration of state frontiers created by the violence and privileges of the landlords and the bourgeoisie of a nation is "utopian."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Kuno Meyer, *op. cit.*, pp. 193–7.

<sup>2</sup> On the Right of Nations to Self-Determination: *Collected Works*, vol. xvii.

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As a model for Communist policy elsewhere the Marxist interpretation of the Irish Question remained of enduring interest. It was for this reason that Lenin was so concerned to defend the validity of Marx's interpretation against all criticism and even to justify those expectations which had been clearly falsified by events. Marx, as we have seen, though opposed to federalism in principle, had advocated a federal solution of the Irish Question provided that Ireland should be liberated, not by a Repeal of the Union enacted by Parliament, but by revolutionary action originating in Ireland and supported by the English working-class. Such a prospect always very remote indeed, had no chance whatever of realization in 1914. Yet Lenin would not acknowledge that Marx's hopes were built on a foundation of sand. Federalism brought about by Marxist methods and resulting in proletarian government throughout the British Isles was in Lenin's view the "ideal solution" of Anglo-Irish difficulties. Lenin admitted that the chance of such a solution was lessening with time, not (as seems obvious to us) because the Marxist premises were mistaken, but because "both the Irish people and the English proletariat proved to be weak."<sup>1</sup> This is an explanation which avoids the issue. Marx miscalculated the reactions of the English working class; he simply did not understand the conservative, the fanatical character, and the emotional side of Irish nationalism, with the result that the Communist tactics were suited to a situation which in fact did not exist. It was inaccurate observation, which was responsible for Marx's miscalculations and Lenin's attempted defence carries conviction only to the converted.

More important, however, than the tactical approach is the theoretic interpretation of Irish problems. Why was Ireland of such interest to Communist leaders from Marx to Lenin? What is the final significance of their writings on Ireland? The interest in Ireland was not aroused by sympathy with

<sup>1</sup> Vide, *Collected Works*, vol. xvi.

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nationalist ideals. So far as sympathy influenced a highly abstract analysis of the Irish Question it was sympathy with the proletariat, with the "men of no property" who were regarded as the predestined victors in the class war. On the whole, however, it is true to say that sympathy played no part in attracting the interest of Marx or Lenin to Ireland, a country which neither of them had ever visited. It was in fact something far different. In the last half century before the collapse of the Union, Ireland by her proximity, and still more by her relation to Great Britain acquired a remarkable significance for the Marxist. Politically and socially the Irish people were discontented. The political system and the social system derived their authority from the same source. The end of British rule in Ireland would involve the breakdown of "capitalist" society. Though the interdependence of politics and the social order diminished rapidly after the Land Act of 1903, yet Lenin still maintained on the eve of the World War that the fall of the British Government would prove the prelude to the Communist revolution in Ireland.

If the Irish were assisted in their fight for political freedom by the English working class, then the triumph of the proletariat in Ireland would inevitably pave the way for the final overthrow of capitalist democracy in Great Britain. Since England in turn was the "bulwark of European capitalism," then revolution in England would be the decisive step forward in the history of World Revolution. Such was the sequence of cause and consequence, all of which, according to Marx, were in the last analysis dependent upon the course of events in Ireland. Such were the circumstances which have given the Irish Question its vicarious significance in Communist literature.

The interest of the Marxist commentary on Ireland is therefore twofold. On the one hand it is a most instructive illustration of the long view and the wide vision that has inspired the programme of revolutionary Communism, and it throws

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into relief as well that inflexibility of mind which is the most serious disadvantage of an ideological approach to political problems. On the other hand the Communist interpretation of the Irish Question, a question highly particularized in its history and development, and in some respects unique in its form and expression, has an enduring interest because it affords an admirable opportunity of testing the validity of the precepts of dialectical materialism as a whole. The distinctiveness of the Irish Question makes it impossible that the accuracy of the Communist doctrine should be finally judged by its application in this one instance, but equally it is an instance that cannot well be ignored. The commentary of Marx is the offspring of the materialist conception of history and it must be viewed in relation to its philosophic background. But the truth of that conception must be tested by reference to particular problems and its inability to furnish a satisfying explanation of Anglo-Irish relations renders the more suspect its ultimate validity. Furthermore, the fundamental doctrine of the class-war is challenged by the evidence of recent Irish history, which by suggesting that economic conflicts between communities are at least as important as economic conflicts between classes and which, by showing that religious and national loyalties exact an allegiance which overrides sectional interests, expose an intrinsic weakness in the materialist conception of the fundamental forces at work.

The last word lies with Lenin who wrote in September 1913:

In 1869 Marx demanded the separation of Ireland, not for the purpose of splitting, but for the subsequent freer Union of Ireland with England, not out of a desire for "justice to Ireland," but for the sake of the interests of the revolutionary struggle of the English proletariat. . . .<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lenin, *Miscellany*, vol. vi.

PART II

*English Statesmen and the Repeal of  
the Union*



## CHAPTER IV

# *Some English Statesmen on the Irish Question, 1880-1914*

"Magnanimity in politics is not seldom the truest wisdom,  
and a great Empire and little minds go ill together."

EDMUND BURKE

HITHERTO we have looked at Ireland mostly from the outside, looked at it through the eyes of contemporary European thinkers and statesmen who were concerned, not with the detail, but with the principles which should determine her future and with the character of the contribution that Ireland might make to European polity. Such an approach is necessarily controversial, for it is concerned with the interpretation of events rather than with the relation of them. In consequence the resulting commentary tends to derive its character more from the philosophy of the individual commentator than from deductions arrived at by a precise observation of the country. This is an admitted disadvantage, but it is outweighed by the advantage of a distant view. The onlooker sees then most of the game and even if he doesn't watch it very closely or for very long, he does acquire a distinct impression of the run of the play.

Cavour, Mazzini, Marx, Engels, and to a lesser extent de Beaumont, considered the principles governing the Irish struggle in a way that was rarely considered by English statesmen or Irish leaders in the nineteenth century. Is the Irish movement a national movement? Or is it merely a demand for better government which has assumed national



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pretensions through exacerbation with the inefficiency of the Union system? If it claims to be a national movement then how far is the Irish claim to distinct nationality justified? How far are these political claims the superficial manifestation of a fundamental economic struggle? These are important questions to which continental observers attempted to formulate an answer. They are questions on which there was little clear thinking nearer home.

We come now to consider the reactions of English statesmen. In contrast with the didactic European commentaries the pragmatism of English statesmanship provides a welcome flexibility in approach. Englishmen did not consider the questions which absorbed the attention of other observers, largely because they did not feel that such questions were important. To them it seemed of little practical advantage to know whether the Irish claim was for national or for good government or whether, if the claim for treatment as a distinct nationality were advanced, that claim was susceptible of philosophic justification or not. Victorian England, permeated with the political philosophy of Burke, was not interested in the "rights" of Irishmen and relegated the whole question to the safer plane of expediency. To them claims to "natural rights" were as ideological and as dangerous as the pronouncements of the Gironde on the Rights of Man. The result was unhappy because each people was speaking in a language which the other did not wholly understand. English statesmen were ignorant, not of Irish affairs, but of the Irish outlook. They did not grasp the significance of that underlying affinity between the Irish and the continental mind and so attributed to Irish perversity what was at least in part an emanation from the continental conception of the supremacy of symbols and abstract ideals in politics. In the last years of the Union English statesmen were prepared to do much to ease the economic conditions of Ireland. Many of them were prepared to reform her system of government, some of them recognized the

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necessity for a grant of self-government to Ireland, but none contemplated the transfer of the symbols of sovereignty to an Irish Parliament. And such a transfer was the hard core of the Irish demands.

From the fall of Disraeli's last administration in 1880 till the outbreak of the Great War there was general agreement amongst English statesmen that the government of Ireland needed reform. But there existed a wide divergence of opinion as to the principle which should guide such reform. On the one hand Mr. Gladstone was convinced that an Act of Union, born in dishonour, cradled in corruption, was destined to perish of political penury; on the other, Mr. Balfour believed that better government was a complete alternative to national government. In the event Mr. Gladstone's analysis was shown to be substantially accurate; Mr. Balfour's policy to be mistaken.

The outline of both the Liberal and Conservative policy for Ireland in these years is familiar. But it is well to remember—since the former was never put into practice and the latter was unsuccessful—that their historical significance may well be over-estimated. For after all, the political atmosphere which made possible the adoption of such policies is of more fundamental importance than the actual policies themselves. In the following pages I hope to bring this background common both to Home Rule and to "killing Home Rule by kindness" into proper relief, by studying the reactions of three English Statesmen of the period 1880-1914, who were *only incidentally* concerned with the Irish problem. As a consequence the names most familiar in Ireland like those of Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Balfour, Mr. Lloyd George, are of set purpose excluded; and our attention is for the moment confined to a brief analysis of the policy and constitutional proposals put forward by Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, by Lord Randolph Churchill and by Mr. Asquith. Neither Mr. Chamberlain nor Lord Randolph were solid representative party men, whilst Mr. Asquith, a liberal

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by temperament and conviction, was a leader whose capacity for analysing an intricate problem was not matched by an equal capacity for resolute action. Since none of them was primarily concerned with Ireland their attitude affords a very valuable indication of the normal response of the political Englishman to the peculiarities of the Irish problem. It goes far to explain both why Home Rule proved unacceptable to the majority of the English people, and why English political thought could offer no solution whereby it might avert a disastrous climax to British rule in Ireland.

Mr. Gladstone was the only English statesman of this epoch who made a positive contribution, so ambitious in character as to aim at a final settlement of the Irish Question. By the Home Rule proposals of 1886 for good or for evil he transformed the existing conception of Anglo-Irish relations; and by the dynamic force of his own personality compelled an unwilling electorate to regard Ireland as the all-important political issue of the day. By this achievement he influenced, sometimes indirectly, but more often directly, the actions of English statesmen for the next half century. Home Rule provided the motive force even of those policies which were designed to render it superfluous. Therefore what Mr. Gladstone said in 1886 is a fact of supreme historical significance. In his speech on the first reading of the first Home Rule Bill he refused to admit that Home Rule was a choice between two evils—rather he argued it was a good in itself:

“We stand face to face with an Irish nationality. Irish nationality vents itself in a demand for separate and complete self-government in Irish, not in imperial, affairs. Is this an evil in itself? Is this a thing that we should view with horror or apprehension? Sir, I hold that it is not. . . . I hold that there is such a thing as local patriotism which is in itself not bad but good. . . . The Irishman is more profoundly Irish, but it does not follow, because his local patriotism is keen that he is incapable of Imperial patriotism. . . .”

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"I ask you to show to Europe and to America that we too can face political problems which America faced twenty years ago and which many countries in Europe have been called upon to face. I ask that we should practise, what we have so often preached, with firm and fearless hand—the doctrine which we have so often inculcated upon others—namely, that the concession of local self-government is not the way to sap and impair, but the way to strengthen and consolidate, unity. I ask that we should learn to rely less upon written stipulations and more upon those better stipulations which are written on the heart and mind of man. I ask that we should apply to Ireland that happy experience we have gained in England and in Scotland, where the course of generations has now taught us that the best and surest foundations we can find to build upon are the foundations afforded by the affections, the convictions, and the will of the nations."

An Irishman might question the premises from which Mr. Gladstone derived his conclusion, but in England criticism was concentrated on the conclusions themselves.

### MR. JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN

"There goes the man who killed Home Rule," cried Parnell, as Chamberlain passed him in the Lobby of the House after Mr. Gladstone's Bill had been defeated. For the rest of his life Mr. Chamberlain had to face the envenomed hostility of the Irish members, not because he had voted against Home Rule—343 members had done that—but because the Nationalists had reckoned this most deadly of antagonists a sympathetic ally. To us who remember Chamberlain as a great Colonial Secretary, as a tariff reformer, as a stirring leader of the new Imperialism such a mistake appears incomprehensible. But in 1886 all this lay in the future; and Parnell could judge only from the past. Mr. Chamberlain had had a somewhat hectic past. He had entered national political life as an advanced

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Radical. The fall of the Second Empire led him to announce in 1870 that "for my part I do not feel any great horror at the possible establishment of a republic in this country. I am quite sure that sooner or later it will come." And Mr. Chamberlain scandalized the dominant Victorian middle class still more by his utterances on social policy. In a famous Birmingham speech he spoke of the "ransom" which the rich must pay to the poor for the enjoyment of their wealth. He declared himself an uncompromising opponent of the orthodox *laissez-faire* economy and urged that the State must intervene—"it must intervene on behalf of the weak against the strong, in the interests of labour against capital, of want and suffering against luxury and ease."

Mr. Chamberlain was interested in social policy; he was not interested in the Irish Question till after 1880. In that year he accepted office under Mr. Gladstone and he represented the Left-wing Liberals in the cabinet whilst Hartington stood for the Right. From the first session of the 1880 Parliament Chamberlain found that Ireland blocked the way to Liberal Reforms in England. For this reason he decided that the Irish incubus must be removed.

The eighteen-eighties were a time of widespread agrarian discontent in Ireland. Mr. Chamberlain influenced the Cabinet to adopt a policy of conciliation and reform. But owing to the combined hostility of Whigs and Tories, it was short-lived. Then with characteristic energy Chamberlain himself tried to design in 1882 a scheme of well-planned public works to afford relief. Nothing was done. He protested. "It may be the work of the Tories," he said, "to crush out discontent. It is the better and higher work of the Liberals to find out the cause of disaffection and to remove it. It is not right to destroy liberty in order to preserve law." In the same year (1882) the Prime Minister's treatment of Irish discontent led Mr. Chamberlain to write a letter on November 16th threatening resignation from the Cabinet on this issue. He wrote: "Redress

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of acknowledged grievances must precede reform. The widespread grievance of the Irish people grows out of causes of just complaint. It is empirical to crush the one without first enquiring into the other.”<sup>1</sup> From these opinions it is clear that Mr. Chamberlain believed that the right approach to the Irish Question lay along the lines of radical social reform. Parnell believed that a man who was so radical on social policy must also be radical on constitutional questions. But Parnell was mistaken. For all the time Chamberlain was hardening in his attitude against the Nationalists and against any form of Irish independence. In 1880 he declared: “For my part I hate coercion. I hate the name. I hate the thing. . . . But I hate disorder more.” And he added significantly, “We want to bind the Irish people to this country in bonds of unity and cordial union.” That was a far cry from the separatist ideals of Parnell.

The election of 1885 is a landmark in English history because it brought into rivalry the three great political personalities of the age—Gladstone, Parnell and Chamberlain—because it marked the opening of a new era in Anglo-Irish relations and because it afforded the first opportunity for expression to new forces in English politics. It was Mr. Chamberlain fighting on the left wing of the Liberal Party who brought into prominence the demand for a clear social policy, and he embodied his proposals in his memorable “unauthorized programme.” His own words explain its content. He said:

“We will fight alone: we will appeal unto Caesar. We will go to the people from whom we come and whose cause we plead. We have been looking to the extension of the franchise in order to bring into prominence questions which have been too long neglected. The great problem of our civilization is still unsolved. We have yet to grapple with the mass of misery and destitution in our midst; co-existent as it is with the evidence of abundant wealth and teeming prosperity. It is a

<sup>1</sup> J. L. Garvin, *Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, vol. i, p. 329, where Gladstone's reply is also reprinted.

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problem which some men put aside by reference to eternal laws of supply and demand, to the necessity of freedom of contract and to the sanctity of every private right of property. But, gentlemen, these phrases are the convenient cant of selfish wealth."<sup>1</sup>

Such was the Radical appeal and in the "unauthorized programme" it was accompanied by definite proposals for the settlement of Ireland, whose character is all too frequently overlooked by historians.

The Radicals conceived that Ireland might be pacified by a Federal Scheme of Government to be known as Home-Rule-All-Round. This proposal intended, by means of National Councils, to devolve powers upon local legislatures, not merely in Ireland, but also in England, Scotland and Wales. Such powers as the local legislatures exercised would be of a purely domestic character and the integrity of the United Kingdom would be preserved by continued representation at Westminster. Mr. Chamberlain outlined his proposals in a letter to Labouchère. He wrote:

"There is only one way of giving bona fide Home Rule, which is the adoption of the American Constitution." This would mean

- (i) Separate Legislatures for England, Scotland, Wales, Southern Ireland and probably Ulster.
- (ii) Imperial Legislature at Westminster for Foreign and Colonial affairs, Army, Navy, Post Office and Customs.
- (iii) A Supreme Court to arbitrate on the limits of authority.

There is a scheme for you. It is the only one compatible with any sort of imperial unity, and once established it might work without friction. But I am not going to swallow separation with my eyes shut."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in J. L. Garvin, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 63-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

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In an election speech Mr. Chamberlain expanded his general reasons for these remarkable constitutional proposals. He said:

"We have also to recognize and to satisfy national sentiment which is in itself a praiseworthy feeling and which both in Scotland and Ireland has led to a demand for a local control in purely domestic affairs. And these objects I believe can only be secured by some great measure of devolution by which the Imperial Parliament shall maintain its supremacy and shall nevertheless relegate to subordinate authorities the control and administration of their local business. I believe . . . that in the successful accomplishment" of this constitutional experiment "lies the only hope of the pacification of Ireland and of the maintenance of the strength and integrity of the Empire. . . ."

In this way there emerged a clear conception of Mr. Chamberlain's objective. He aimed sincerely at the pacification of Ireland, but in order to achieve it there was a certain limit beyond which he was not prepared to go. The continued supremacy of the Imperial Parliament was to him the supreme necessity. This explains his anxiety to secure a federal solution which would preserve the integrity of the United Kingdom, his desire for uniformity, as between the governments of Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and his frequent (but misleading) analogies with the Constitution of the United States. It is possible that in practice such a scheme of devolution would have developed in Ireland into a system of self-government. But it is not probable; for we know that Parnell replied to a letter of Chamberlain's, in which these proposals had been broached, by remarking that it "would hardly be worth while to encumber the Irish Question with a larger extension of local government." The issue indeed was clear. It was the essence of Parnell's claim that the Irish Question was a distinctive national issue; it was the aim of Chamberlain to show that it was part of a general demand for better local government *within* the United Kingdom.

The Liberal failure to win a decisive victory in the country



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at the 1885 election left Mr. Chamberlain in a good strategic position. Mr. Chamberlain joined the Cabinet, but from the first he was uncomfortable. He disagreed with Mr. Gladstone on two points. In the first place he disliked the Land Purchase Bill which the Prime Minister regarded as an integral part of his policy for the settlement of Ireland. Mr. Chamberlain objected not in principle but on the particular ground that the compensation proposed was unduly favourable to the Irish landlord. At the election the Radicals had gained many votes in rural constituencies with the slogan of "three acres and a cow"; and they felt that English agriculture was being sacrificed. Later in opposition they drew effective and vivid pictures of a train of railway trucks two miles long, loaded with millions of bright sovereigns, all travelling from the pocket of the British son of toil to the idle Irish landlord. Secondly, Mr. Chamberlain disagreed with the Prime Minister on the vital issue of Home Rule. Mr. Gladstone aimed at the establishment of a separate Parliament in Dublin and no Irish representation at Westminster. This cleavage of opinion came to a head in March 1886. Mr. Chamberlain then asked the Prime Minister in a Cabinet memorandum four questions:

- (i) Whether Irish Representation at Westminster was to cease.
- (ii) Whether the power of taxation was to be vested in the Home Rule Parliament.
- (iii) Whether the Judges were to be appointed by an Irish authority.
- (iv) Whether the Irish Parliament was to have authority in every matter not specifically excluded from its jurisdiction.

Here we have the acid tests of his distinction between Home Rule consistent with Federal Union and Home Rule weakening the visible links of unity. It was, Mr. Chamberlain's biographer

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has said with questionable accuracy,<sup>1</sup> a great and plain issue. To all the questions Mr. Gladstone replied in the affirmative and so in the negative to Chamberlain's ideas. Chamberlain resigned at once and thus in effect killed Home Rule.

For the rest of his life Mr. Chamberlain adhered to the Federal solution of the Irish Question. For he knew that he had killed Home Rule, but he did not realize that Home Rule had killed his scheme of devolution. It is ironic to reflect that the two constructive proposals for the solution of the Irish Question were regarded by Chamberlain as antagonistic and so destined to prove mutually destructive. Chamberlain opposed the second Home Rule Bill for the same reason that he had opposed the first. But his interests were soon to be drawn to other fields, to South Africa and then to Europe. When von Bülow visited Windsor in 1899 with the Kaiser he recorded an impression of Chamberlain who was then working for an Anglo-German Alliance, which explains a side of his character which Irishmen did not easily understand. "Chamberlain," wrote Bülow, "is the modern merchant, very decided, very shy, very scrupulous, very much aware of his own advantage, and yet sincere, for he knows that without sincerity there can be no big business."<sup>2</sup> Like the Gods of Olympus Chamberlain heard the demands of Nationalist members—

Streaming up a lamentation and an ancient tale of wrong,  
Like a tale of little meaning though the words are strong.

Certainly the words were strong: and it was not infrequently that the Irish members detected a striking resemblance between the character of Mr. Joseph Chamberlain and that of Judas Iscariot. But it would be a mistake to believe that the basis of this hostility was a petty political quarrel. It was rather a

<sup>1</sup> J. L. Garvin, *Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, vol. ii, Chamberlain's memorandum quoted, p. 192.

<sup>2</sup> *Grosse Politik*, xv. No. 4398: Dugdale, vol. iii, p. 113.

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division of opinion on a vital matter of principle. Parnell after all was a separatist; Chamberlain was one of Nature's imperialists.

### LORD RANDOLPH CHURCHILL

If Mr. Chamberlain is remembered in Ireland as the man who killed Home Rule, Lord Randolph Churchill is remembered as the author of the jingling line "Ulster will fight; Ulster will be right." Both these phrases are revealing. The former reminds us of the decisive influence of Mr. Chamberlain's conversion to imperialism; the latter makes it plain that Lord Randolph was a politician not unduly sensitive as to the niceties of the dividing line between constitutional and unconstitutional opposition. In Belfast Lord Randolph had heard, as Kubla Khan of old, "ancestral voices prophesying war." In the North this is a feat of no great difficulty—even for an English statesman. Lord Randolph determined that this situation should be exploited in order to break Home Rule. In 1885 he wrote to a Tory friend, "The Orange card is the one to play. Please God! It may prove the ace of trumps." We know that the Unionist Party played the "orange card" with frequency and with effect during the next half century. The consequences in Ireland are obvious to all. But it was this conscious endeavour to play off the North against the South that did more than anything else to undermine the prestige and the good name of English parties amongst the Irish people. Lord Randolph felt no uneasiness. In 1886, when Leader of the House of Commons and Chancellor of the Exchequer, he was charged by Sir William Harcourt with a very real responsibility for the riots against Home Rule which had occurred in Belfast. Lord Randolph replied with characteristic boldness, "There is not," he said, "a shred of a shadow of a shade, or a shade of a shadow of a shred of foundation for this indictment." But history records a less emphatic verdict.

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It might be supposed from Lord Randolph's intervention in Belfast that he was a stern, unbending Tory. But nothing could be more misleading. This vivid and vital personality, whose brief career was over at the age of forty-six, lends a certain charm to those grim political contests which marked the close of the Gladstonian era. His sympathies with the injustices of Ireland and his realization of the inadequacies of her system of government, were sincere. One of his early political speeches in 1877 indicated the distance that separated the attitude of a progressive Tory from that of the vast majority of his party. In that year Lord Randolph declared that he could not vote for Home Rule because that would mean the exclusion of the Irish members from Westminster. Without them more than one-third of the life and the soul of the House of Commons would be lost. "Banish them," he said, "and a House composed only of Englishmen and Scotsmen would sink to the condition of a vestry."<sup>1</sup> And more seriously, he added, "I have no hesitation in saying that it is inattention to Irish legislation that has produced obstruction. There are great and crying Irish questions which the Government have not attended to, do not seem to be inclined to attend to, and perhaps do not intend to attend to—the question of intermediate and higher education, the question of municipal and parliamentary electoral privileges—and as long as these matters are neglected, so long will the Government have to deal with obstruction in Ireland. . . ." This speech attracted a lot of attention. Mr. Parnell, speaking at Paisley three days later, declared that if the Government would pass the measures alluded to by Lord Randolph they would not be troubled by Irish obstruction in the next session. In the Tory Party this speech was regarded with unqualified disapproval. The *Morning Post* was vigorous in denunciation and Sir Michael Hicks-Beach wrote at once in protest to Lord Randolph's father—the Duke of Marlborough. The latter replied, "My

<sup>1</sup> W. S. Churchill, *Lord Randolph Churchill*, vol. i, pp. 90-1.

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dear Beach,—The only excuse I can find for Randolph is that he must either be mad or have been singularly affected with local champagne or claret. I can only say that the sentiments he had indulged in are purely his own.”<sup>1</sup> But Lord Randolph’s logic was plain. It was because he hoped that these issues of social policy would be settled by the Government and not by the Liberal or Home Rule party that he brought them into prominence.

The motive force behind Lord Randolph’s Irish policy was identical with that which led him to enunciate his creed of Tory Democracy. The Act of Union, as he said, was passed; but in the passing of it all the arsenal of political corruption and chicanery was exhausted in order to inaugurate a series of remedial and healing measures. If the Act was not productive of such effects then it would be entitled, he said, to be unequivocally condemned by history. It was for these reasons that he always opposed the coercive measures advocated by the other members of the Tory party and objected to the sanction of the House of extreme penalties against the Irish members, believing as he did that the cure for discontent and for obstruction lay in the enactment of conciliatory legislation. For this cause he was throughout his life a consistent and able advocate of educational reform in Ireland.

Lord Randolph’s attitude to Ireland is so dependent upon the doctrine of Tory democracy that it is worth recalling what he meant by this phrase. In 1884, he said, “The Whigs are a class with the prejudices and vices of a class, the Radicals are a sect with the tyranny and fanaticism of a sect . . . but the Tories are of the people.” Therefore Tory Democracy is a democracy which supports the Tory party . . . “because it has been taught by experience to believe in the soundness of true Tory principles. But Tory Democracy also involves another idea of equal importance. It involves the idea of a Government who in all the branches of their policy and in

<sup>1</sup> Vide W. S. Churchill, *Life of Lord Randolph Churchill*, vol. i, pp. 92-4.

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all the features of their administration are animated by lofty and by Liberal ideas."<sup>1</sup> That gives a not unfair description of Lord Randolph's approach to Irish affairs.

Fundamentally Lord Randolph was in full agreement with his party as to the necessity of preserving the Union. Mr. Gladstone's Home Rule Bill he demolished in a phrase. It was, he said, "a farrago of superlative nonsense designed to gratify the ambition of an old man in a hurry." He wanted Liberal reforms and a progressive social policy; he did not want constitutional change. On that point he was characteristically emphatic. In a speech at Edinburgh he said, "We owe the Irish a great deal for our bad government of them in the past—but by giving continuous support to the Tory party let the Irish know, though they cry day and night, though they vex you with much wickedness and harass you with much disorder, though they cause you all manner of trial and trouble, there is one thing you will detect at once in whatever guise it may present itself, there is one thing you will never listen to, there is one thing you will never yield—and that is their demand for an Irish Parliament."<sup>2</sup>

Lord Randolph Churchill's policy towards Ireland was clear-sighted and generous. If it *was* possible to maintain the Union, then a complete and conscientious application of the principles of Tory democracy was the only practical means by which it might be achieved. Too many members of the Tory party were content to rule by coercion, allowing intervals in its application in order that they might have an opportunity of expressing surprise at Irish ingratitude. In the same spirit Tories professed the comfortable belief that Providence would settle the Irish Question and thus absolve them from the necessity of doing anything about it. The significance of Lord Randolph's proposals lies in the fact that he did put forward

<sup>1</sup> A sympathetic account is given in W. S. Churchill, *op. cit.*, vol. i, chap. vi, and in Lord Rosebery's *Lord Randolph Churchill*, p. 116 seq.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in W. S. Churchill, *op. cit.*, vol. i, pp. 280-1.

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a principle of government, which, whilst maintaining intact the constitutional framework of the United Kingdom, would also do something to remedy the grievances of the Irish.

### MR. ASQUITH

In one of his novels (*Endymion*) Disraeli wrote that "an insular people subject to fogs, and possessing a powerful middle-class requires grave statesmen." Mr. Asquith was grave. He was a man of the highest intellectual attainments. To an unimpeachable integrity of mind he added the sagacious scepticism of an Oxford humanist. Yet he made no personal contribution to the solution of the Irish Question. To a degree surprising in one "who was master of so many of the arts of government, he was without initiative in ideas and policy. We may speak of an Asquithian phrase or an Asquithian attitude, but not of an Asquithian doctrine or idea. It was not his mission to find the raw materials of policy, but rather to shape and direct them when the course of events brought them within his reach."<sup>1</sup> So the most recent of his biographers has written, and in Irish affairs this lack of intellectual initiative was reinforced by the history of Home Rule. When Asquith succeeded Campbell-Bannerman in 1908 Gladstone's Irish policy was invested with all the sanctity of a traditional Liberal cause. The shadow of a great name, the memory of an heroic conflict, hung over the deliberations of the Liberal party. No alternative seemed possible. Mr. Gladstone's policy of 1886 must be adopted as Mr. Asquith's policy in 1910.

Mr. Asquith's analysis of the Irish Question was not lacking in distinction. In his maiden speech in the Commons delivered as early as 1887 he attacked Mr. Balfour's policy. What value, he asked, lies in representative institutions when the voices of the representatives are systematically ignored. "What conceivable advantage," he went on, "can there be either to

<sup>1</sup> R. B. McCallum, *Asquith*, p. 12.

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England or to Ireland from the continuance of this gross caricature of the British Constitution. There is much virtue in government of the people, by the people, for the people. There is much also to be said for a powerful and well-equipped autocracy, but between the two there is no logical or statesman-like halting place. For the hybrid system which the Government is about to set up, a system which pretends to be that which it is not . . . a system which cannot be either resolutely repressive or frankly popular—for this half-hearted compromise there is inevitably reserved the inexorable sentence which history shows must fall on every form of political imposture.”<sup>1</sup> By 1912 further point was added to Mr. Asquith’s criticism, for by then the vast majority of the representatives of the Irish people had demanded Home Rule for close on forty years. Could a demand constitutionally proposed and consistently supported be indefinitely ignored under a democratic system of Government? That was the question Mr. Asquith felt bound to meet.

Mr. Asquith knew the Irish controversy by heart. He had lived with it all through his political life and sat in the Cabinet with Mr. Gladstone when he made his last effort in 1893. The Bill of 1912 followed the Gladstonian line of transferring purely Irish matters to the Irish Parliament, whilst reserving to the Imperial Parliament all matters of foreign and imperial importance. The bill was not so complete as Mr. Gladstone’s, and the main question about it as an administrative measure was whether after the numerous concessions to Unionist sentiment made in the original proposal and afterwards in Committee it would have been a workable measure.

There is no purpose to be served by reviewing again the political struggle of 1912-14, but two considerations closely affecting Asquith’s reputation as a statesman should not be overlooked. The passing of the Parliament Act in 1911 gave

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Spender and Asquith, *Life of Lord Oxford and Asquith*, vol. i, p. 54-6.



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a new edge to the controversy because it was now clear that Home Rule could not be blocked indefinitely by the Lords. From the point of view of the Government, the great defect in the Parliament Act was that it left a period of two and a half years in which revolt in Ulster could be organized. As a consequence the Prime Minister was faced by the Ulster opposition in a peculiarly acute form. In February 1912 the Cabinet anxiously debated whether the Unionist counties of Ulster should be given an option to contract out in the Bill as introduced or whether this should be reserved as a concession for a later stage. The Cabinet decided on the latter course, largely because Mr. Asquith was determined that the Government policy should be a policy for the whole of Ireland.<sup>1</sup> In the light of after events I think this decision was a mistake. However admirable in principle, it would have been politically wiser to have given the Unionist minority certain substantial safeguards in the Bill whilst at the same time making it clear that the Home Rule Parliament would be the supreme legislature for all Ireland. The policy of postponing concessions was made the more culpable by the fact that the Cabinet knew that the provisions of the Parliament Act made it politically certain that the Bill would not be enacted for two and a half years.

Finally, it is pertinent to observe that Mr. Asquith's Irish policy was never brought to a conclusion. When in the summer of 1914 the Buckingham Palace Conference attempted a settlement of the Irish deadlock, the future of Great Britain depended, as Mr. Churchill has since noted with undisguised revulsion, upon the disposition of clusters of humble parishes in Ulster.<sup>2</sup> But the deliberations of the Conference were in vain. No agreement was reached. A few weeks later the European War broke out. Mr. Asquith's reputation in Ireland depends upon an 'if'—would there have been civil war in Ireland had not a

<sup>1</sup> Spender and Asquith, *Life of Lord Oxford and Asquith*, vol. II, p. 15 seq.

<sup>2</sup> *World Crisis*, Revised Edition, p. 109.

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European War intervened? Or was the Conference the first indication of a *détente* in party feeling which would have allowed of an Irish settlement in substantial accord with Liberal policy? Or would the approaching election have vindicated the Unionist opposition? Since one cannot answer with finality, the verdict on Asquith's Irish policy must be suspended. But all the evidence available suggests that, had war not intervened, Asquith's policy would not have been vindicated. It is most improbable that the Liberals would have secured a majority at the next election. Quite apart from growing Unionist strength the Labour party were preparing to contest many of the hitherto safe radical seats. Leith and Midlothian had already been lost to the Government in by-elections. The Liberal tide was ebbing and Asquith's Irish policy was largely responsible for it.

The third Home Rule Bill has all the qualities of an epilogue, and in fairness to Mr. Asquith one must remember that in addition to the normal difficulties of the Irish Question he was faced with the problem of dealing with a reckless and unconstitutional opposition in Ulster. In these circumstances his sagacity and foresight were wasted. He was the first English statesman to recommend Dominion Status for Ireland in 1919; and perhaps even while advocating Home Rule he realized it would provide no solution. It has been said in criticism of Mr. Lansbury that he allows his bleeding heart to run away with his bloody head. It is a curious commentary on this phase of Anglo-Irish relations to say that the spontaneous enthusiasms of Mr. Lansbury might well have contributed more to an agreement in the critical months of 1914 than the sceptical benevolence of Mr. Asquith.

#### CONCLUSION

This brief survey of the record and policy of three of the most notable of English statesmen of the last half century reflects

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not unfairly the psychological reaction of English democratic leaders to Irish problems. All three exercised a notable if mainly negative influence upon the course of Irish history. In no case does the reputation of any of these statesmen depend to any vital extent upon their attitude to the Irish Question. Lord Randolph Churchill's reputation stands or falls by the future of Tory Democracy; Mr. Chamberlain must be judged as a Radical imperialist and as a tariff reformer; and history will honour Mr. Asquith as the leader of the last of those Whig-Liberal administrations which so adorned the golden age of English Parliamentary Government. It is for this reason that an analysis of their attitude to Ireland throws a very real light upon recent Anglo-Irish relations. We witness the consequences; it has been the aim of this study to indicate the causes. And since the Irish policy of these statesmen is not the product of specialized study, but rather is implicit in their political outlook, it is revealing.

The basis of policy in each instance was provided by the comparative or absolute failure of the Act of Union. It was the aim of Mr. Asquith to secure Repeal; it was the purpose of Mr. Chamberlain to replace it by a general scheme of devolution. Lord Randolph wished to preserve it intact in order that it might provide the basis of conservative social reform. But though these three statesmen might agree that the existing government of Ireland was unsatisfactory, the conflict of opinion as to the principle of reform was bitter. No more suggestive remark on this phase of English statesmanship towards Ireland has been made than that of Lord Salisbury. He said that Mr. Gladstone, in struggling for Home Rule, had "awakened the slumbering genius of Imperialism."

It would be presumptuous to draw general conclusions from so slight a study of particular men or particular events. But none the less there are a few issues raised which call for some comment. In the first place it is curious that there is no development in the views on the Irish Question expressed by these

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English Statesmen. Lord Randolph advocated certain reforms in social policy, notably in education, in his earliest political speeches. He was advocating the same reforms in 1895, the year of his death. Mr. Chamberlain proposed the federal solution in his unauthorized programme in 1885. No later speeches indicate that he was prepared to advance any other solution, even though devolution was obviously impracticable by the close of the century. Mr. Asquith was a member of Mr. Gladstone's Ministry when the second Home Rule Bill was introduced in 1893. When he put forward his own Bill in 1912 the only alteration was to reduce the authority of the proposed Home Rule Parliament. When one remembers the changes in other fields, this inelasticity in outlook is remarkable. It indicates either a problem insoluble in accordance with their preconceived assumptions or unreceptive minds. It is significant that it was Mr. Gladstone who said, "I have been a learner all my life and a learner I shall continue unto the end."

The Irish Question was essentially a problem in politics. So obvious a conclusion is worth emphasizing because of the current tendency to explain every event by a pseudo-Marxist interpretation of history. The Materialist conception of history assumes (to quote from Engels) "that the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in man's brains, not in man's better insight into the principles of eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange. They are to be sought, not in the *philosophy* but in the *economics* of each particular epoch." Such an approach illuminates the course of Anglo-Irish relations, but it does not explain it.

Finally, one would suggest that the failure of English statesmen to solve the Irish Question was not due to any lack of good will. It was caused rather by an inability to understand the Irish political outlook, by confusion of mind as to the distinction between good government and national government, and by the inability of the electorate to decide finally

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in favour of one particular policy. But the most damaging indictment that history will lay against the statesmen of this age cannot be included in any of these categories. The indictment is this. When it was realized that a new order in Ireland was *inevitable*, English statesmen did nothing to facilitate its emergence. It is not so much that they hoped the Irish Question would, like Swinburne's river, "wind somewhere safe to sea," but that they resolutely tried to check its flow. In so doing they prolonged the travail and the birth-pangs of a new state.

But in fairness to English statesmanship in Ireland I would like to leave you with a question. Lord Randolph Churchill once exclaimed to John Morley, "Ah, but then Balfour and you are men who believe in the solution of political questions."<sup>1</sup> When one recalls that Morley was the most devoted champion of Gladstonian Home Rule, that Balfour was the only conservative statesman who aspired to achieve a final and constructive settlement of the Irish Question, then Lord Randolph's remark may well prompt a doubt as to whether any peaceful settlement was possible. For while John Morley firmly repudiated the implication that the statesman is a man who does not believe in the solution of political questions, yet even he has not failed to remind us that in history there is such a thing as an insoluble problem. May it not be that the settlement of Ireland by English statesmen in fact presented such a problem?

<sup>1</sup> Morley, *Recollections*, vol. 1, p. 191.

## CHAPTER V

### *The Liberal Conversion to Home Rule*

"And what he greatly thought he nobly dared "

POPE

"Magnis tamen excidit ausis."

OVID

THE great political tradition that had been enthroned at the Revolution upon the principles of Sydney and Locke dominated English political life for more than two and a quarter centuries. "I understood it," wrote Burke of the Whig Party which was founded upon them, "to be a party in its composition and in its principles connected with the solid, permanent, long possessed property of the country; a party which, by a temper derived from that species of property, and affording a security to it, was attached to the ancient, tried usages of the kingdom: a party therefore essentially constructed upon a ground plot of stability and independence; a party therefore equally removed from servile court compliances, and from popular levity, presumption and precipitation."<sup>1</sup>

A line of famous historians has done full justice to this party whose achievements comprise almost all the landmarks in modern English history—from the Glorious Revolution to the Great Reform Bill, to the Education Act, to National Health Insurance, to the Parliament Act. In the days of prosperity, under Walpole, under Newcastle, under Melbourne as in the days of adversity that succeeded the Napoleonic War, the

<sup>1</sup> Letter to William Waddell, January 31, 1792.

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Whigs lukewarm in allegiance to their creed merited full well the rebuke once administered to the Church of the Laodiceans, but as a whole this record of high achievement was founded upon a devotion to political principle rarely surpassed in the annals of a political party. In Great Britain the decline of the Liberal party coincided with the fulfilment of its distinctive contribution to the welfare of the State. In Ireland alone is the record one of final frustration and failure.

Indeed, to an Irishman the pretension of the Whig-Liberal party to be a party whose policy has been guided by principle appears paradoxical. The Orangeman, ever mindful of the beneficial results of the Battle of the Boyne, is reluctant to associate the principles that animated the Whig party of the Glorious Revolution, or indeed any principle at all, with the "great betrayal" contemplated by Gladstone in 1886. The Nationalist has more substantial and more recent grounds for scepticism. Was it political principle or was it the solid value of some eighty Irish votes that converted Gladstone to Home Rule? Was not a Liberal Government in power when the *Fanny* landed her cargo at Larne and when the shots were fired in Bachelors Walk? Was it not the Liberal Prime Minister of a Coalition Cabinet who after the war dismissed Dominion Home Rule for Ireland with the Question "Was ever such lunacy proposed by anybody?" Was it not the same Liberal Prime Minister who in October 1920 promised "to break up the small body of assassins, a real murder gang dominating the country and terrorizing it?" and who a month later declared that "he had murder by the throat?" and who a year later negotiating with the "chosen leader of the vast majority of the Irish people" warned them that the failure to accept Dominion status would be followed by "immediate and terrible war?" Irishmen may perhaps be pardoned for a failure to associate such a policy with those principles for which Hampden died in the field and Sidney on the scaffold.

Yet up to 1914 the Liberal party—and responsibility for

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post-war policy should not in fairness be attributed to it—had sacrificed much, perhaps its very existence as a party, for the sake of securing a just and Liberal settlement of the Irish Question. That the policy failed is indeed true, but that suggests less an over-careful scrutiny of party interest than a too rigid devotion to principle. The secession of both Whigs and Radicals was the price exacted for the adoption of a Home Rule policy, and in consequence the defeat of the first Home Rule Bill was followed—with but one brief interlude—by nineteen years in the wilderness, at a time when the Liberal party so confidently hoped to reap the harvest of the third Reform Bill. And it was no mere coincidence that the Cabinet which in 1912 for the third and last time staked the fortunes of the party on the solution of the Irish Question was the last Liberal Government in English history.

The alliance between Liberal and Nationalist formed by Gladstone and Parnell in 1886 brought little fortune to either. For the history of Home Rule, the policy which alone could unite them, is a history of much endeavour but no achievement. It is a story of violent controversy in which statesmanlike vision and abysmal ignorance of Irish life, lofty purpose and sordid intrigue, generous action and mean betrayal, produce a picture of bewildering contrasts. It is a story stained by crime yet not devoid of heroism—a story that is told because one English party gave an allegiance, wavering and ineffective at the last, to the principle of self-government for Ireland; a story that might have had a climax had that party pondered the detail as well as the principle of its policy. "Think, I beseech you," said Mr. Gladstone in concluding his speech on the first Home Rule Bill in 1886, "think well, think wisely, think not for a moment but for the years that are to come before you reject this Bill." Mr. Gladstone knew that the future of Ireland and of Anglo-Irish relations was at stake, but he did not know that the future of the Liberal party was also weighed in the balance that night.



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The influence of Irish policy upon the fortunes of the Liberal party may not be determined with absolute precision. That it was destructive is clear, but whether it was fatal is open to doubt. It seems probable that the changing social conditions in England, so favourable to the growth of Labour, were in themselves sufficient to undermine the foundations of the Liberal party; it is possible too that the system of power politics in Europe with its recurrent threat of war deprived Liberalism of its essential cosmopolitan background in culture as in trade; it has been maintained that a party whose creed was essentially political was unfitted to solve the economic and social problems of our time, and it has been argued that the party perished simply because of internal dissension. It is certain that all these causes were contributory to the fall of the Liberal party and to dissociate them in order to determine the exact effect of each is a task as difficult as it is unprofitable. 'Caesar's body bore the marks of many wounds; it is idle to speculate how many of them were fatal. It is rather our purpose here to recall the circumstances of the conversion to Home Rule, to analyse the motives which prompted it, and to observe how this policy hastened the day of the final disintegration of the Liberal party.

### **"MY MISSION IS TO PACIFY IRELAND"**

In an election address of 1812 Romilly explained to the electors of Bristol what he considered to be the principles of a sound Whig:

He ought to be a man firmly attached to those principles of our constitution which were established at the Revolution. . . . He should justly appreciate and be ready at all times to maintain the liberty of the press and the trial by jury which are the greatest securities for all our other liberties. He should be a sincere friend of peace. . . . He should be an enemy to that influence of the Crown and of the Ministers of the

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Crown which has been so fatally exercised in the House of Commons and consequently a friend to Parliamentary Reform. He should be a constant advocate for economy in the public expenditure and a determined enemy to corruption and speculation. He should be ready when he sees abuses arising from any of our present institutions, to enquire into the causes of them and to suggest a remedy notwithstanding the reproach of being an innovator. Above all he should be a man incapable of being severed from his duty by the threats of power, the allurements of the great, the temptations of private interest, or even the seduction of popular favour.<sup>1</sup>

This portrait of a Whig, old-fashioned and a trifle self-righteous though it be, does present an ideal to which Gladstone himself would not have hesitated to subscribe. He was a friend of peace, a constant advocate of economy, he opposed the undue influence of the officers of the Crown—in Dublin Castle where it alone survived, it was because he saw abuses arising “from our present institutions” that he suggested the remedy of Home Rule, notwithstanding the politically fatal “reproach of being an innovator.” And neither two defeats in the Commons, nor even the partial disintegration of his party caused him to modify a policy in order to regain popular support in England.

Gladstone's conversion to Home Rule was a more gradual process than is allowed by those who profess to see in it the throw of a political gambler. For long before 1886 Gladstone had been extraordinarily conscious of Ireland. In 1850 he wrote from Germany, “I cannot trace the line of my own future life, but I hope and pray it may not always be where it is. . . . Ireland! Ireland! That cloud in the west, that coming storm, the minister of God's retribution upon cruel and inveterate, and but half-atoned injustice.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Romilly, *Speeches*, II, 466, quoted in H. W. C. Davis, *Age of Grey and Peel*, pp. 267–8.

<sup>2</sup> To Mrs. Gladstone: vide Morley, *Life of Gladstone*, vol. i, p. 383.

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It was on the afternoon of December 1, 1868, when Gladstone was in his shirt sleeves wielding an axe that a telegraph messenger arrived with the news that he had been charged with the formation of his first Cabinet. He remarked, "Very significant" and resumed his work. But after a few minutes the blows ceased and Gladstone resting on the handle of his axe looked up and with deep earnestness in his voice exclaimed, "My mission is to pacify Ireland." He then resumed his chopping and did not stop till the tree was felled.<sup>1</sup> This awareness of Ireland was intellectual rather than emotional. His knowledge of Irish political problems was profound, but his understanding of the Irish character was slight. He visited the country but once, and that was in 1877. "He was feasted," writes John Morley, "by the Provost of Trinity in spite of disestablishment and he had friendly conversation with Cardinal Cullen in spite of Vaticanism."<sup>2</sup> But he did not travel beyond the Pale.

When Gladstone's second government fell in June 1885, it was succeeded by a minority Conservative Government under Lord Salisbury, which lasted seven months. This Government, dependent on the Irish vote, was anxious to retain the goodwill of Parnell. So Lord Spencer's system of "firm government" enforced after the Phoenix Park murders came to an abrupt end and in its place Ireland enjoyed the spectacle of a Conservative Government sponsoring the first State-assisted scheme of Land Purchase.<sup>3</sup> The compliance of the Conservatives confirmed Parnell in his contemptuous belief that English parties could always be bought—with votes. In August he declared that the Irish in the new Parliament would have "a platform with only one plank and that national independence." The English Press was loud in denunciation, but both Lord Salisbury and Lord Randolph Churchill maintained a discreet reserve. Mr. Gladstone, too, kept a wide door

<sup>1</sup> To Mrs. Gladstone: vide Morley, *Life of Gladstone*, vol. II, p. 251.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 571.

<sup>3</sup> Lord Ashbourne's Act.

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open in the Hawarden manifesto, but of his former colleagues both Hartington on behalf of the Whigs and Chamberlain on behalf of the Radicals sternly rebuked Parnell.<sup>1</sup> Both the silence and the condemnation carried a significance not to be lost on a politician so astute as the Irish leader.

The conversion of the Tories from a policy of "resolute government" to one of concession in Ireland made a startling impression among the rank and file of the Tory party. Joseph Chamberlain, who approved the new policy, none the less denounced that "astounding tergiversation" of ministers and declared that "a strategic movement of this kind, executed in opposition to the notorious convictions of the men who effected it, carried out for party purposes and for party purposes alone, is the most flagrant instance of political dishonesty this country has ever known."<sup>2</sup> Lord Hartington added in weighty and more restrained language that the Government had dealt a heavy blow "both at political morality and at the cause of order in Ireland." But for Parnell the victory was complete. Insensitive to the moral reputation of English parties he had no scruples in tempting them to bid for the valuable asset that lay in his power alone to give or to withhold. Only one question troubled him; which party would pay the higher price?

Parnell's choice is a matter of history. He held his hand till two days before the election and then on November 21, 1885, he issued a manifesto ordering the Irish in Great Britain to vote Conservative. In appearance the verdict of the electorate realized Parnell's most sanguine hopes. The Nationalists securing a bloc of 86 seats held the balance in the new House. As a result, although the Liberals secured 333 seats to the Tories' 251, yet their dream of a majority over Tories and Nationalists combined, as Morley sadly observed, "had glided away through the 'ivory gate.'" But, in fact, while Parnell

<sup>1</sup> Vide R. C. K. Ensor, *England, 1870-1914*, pp. 91-2.

<sup>2</sup> Speech, July 24, 1885.

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could keep either English party out of office he could put only the Liberals in. Before the end of the year the Nationalist Tory alliance was sundered and the Liberal Nationalist entente was an established fact.

What terms Parnell had secured from the Tories is shrouded in obscurity. From Lord Salisbury's utterances in the autumn of 1885 it is clear that the concessions to Irish self-government were indeed substantial, but the publication of the detail was dependent upon the contingency of a Tory Nationalist majority which did not in the event materialize. So Lord Salisbury reverted to the well-tried Tory expedient of coercion.

Meanwhile, how is one to account for Gladstone's conversion to Home Rule—a conversion apparently so sudden as to warrant the suspicion of an unprincipled manoeuvre in order to regain office. After all it was only a short while since the demand for Home Rule had been universally regarded in England as a cry of sedition, only a few months since Gladstone himself had described the Irish who were agitating for it “as marching through plunder to the disintegration of the Empire,” and had declared to an enthusiastic company assembled in the City of London “that the resources of civilization were not exhausted” in dealing with them. It was only four years since a Liberal Government had perpetrated “England's cruel wrong.”

Before this wrong all other wrongs of Ireland do grow pale,  
For they've clapped the pride of Erin's Isle into cold Kilmainham  
jail.

It was the tyrant Gladstone and he said unto himself  
“I never will be aisy till Parnell is on the shelf,  
So I'll make the warrant out in haste and take it by the mail,  
And we'll clap the pride of Erin's Isle in cold Kilmainham  
jail.”

So Buckshot<sup>1</sup> tuk the warrant and he buttoned up his coat  
And tuk the train to Holyhead to catch the Kingstown boat.

<sup>1</sup> Known in England as the Right Hon. W. E. Forster.

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Such was the background to Mr. Gladstone's conversion to the creed of Parnell. It startled a generation unaccustomed, as we are to-day, to sudden changes in political outlook; and in the light of this fact alone is it possible to comprehend the cause of the sustained venom of the attacks to which Mr. Gladstone was subjected. A people slow to form a judgment on political questions had been surprised, and fearing the worst they were impressed by the most absurd caricatures of Mr. Gladstone's character and motives.<sup>1</sup> Lord Randolph Churchill, lately Secretary of State for India and in a few months to be Chancellor of the Exchequer, said in his election address of 1886 to his constituents in South Paddington, "Mr. Gladstone has reserved for his closing days a conspiracy against the honour of Britain and the welfare of Ireland more startlingly base and nefarious than any of those other numerous designs and plots, which, during the last quarter of a century have occupied his imagination." This "design for the separation of Ireland from Britain, this insane recurrence to heptarchical arrangements, this trafficking with treason, this condonation of crime, the exaltation of the disloyal, the abasement of the legal, this desertion of our Protestant co-religionists, this monstrous mixture of imbecility, extravagance and political hysterics" was "a tissue of absurdities" such as "the united and concentrated genius of Bedlam and Colney Hatch would strive in vain to produce." Unfortunately for the prospects of Home Rule the prejudice aroused by Mr. Gladstone's sudden change of front acquired from a variety of circumstances a substance which can be dissipated to-day only by a careful scrutiny of evidence not then available to the electorate.

During the autumn of 1885 Mr. Gladstone's attitude to Irish problems was reserved and the Delphic ambiguity of his utterances gave the public no clue as to his intentions. Subsequently his friends asserted that this silence marked the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mr. J. A. Spender's opinion in Great Britain, *Empire and Commonwealth*, pp. 3-6.

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caution of a statesman waiting till the hour should strike; his enemies that it cloaked the ambitions of a man anxious to return to office even at the price of corrupt capitulation to Irish demands. Neither assertion was entirely true. Gladstone was a convert to Home Rule before the elections. But he was scrupulously careful in concealing his conversion not only from the electorate, but also from the majority of his colleagues and from Parnell. Morley's defence is not wholly convincing: "Mr. Gladstone had pondered the matter deeply. His gift of political imagination, his wider experience . . . planted him on a height whence he commanded a view of possibilities and necessities, of hope and risks that were unseen by politicians of the beaten track. Like a pilot amid wandering icebergs, or in waters where familiar buoys have been taken up and immemorial beacons put out, he scanned the scene with keen eyes and a glass sweeping the horizon in every direction. No wonder that his words seemed vague, and vague they undoubtedly were. This was no moment for ultimatums. There were too many unascertained elements."<sup>1</sup> Less reverent critics, incapable of regarding Gladstone as a pilot amid wandering icebergs, remain sceptical. No doubt, Gladstone, as many lesser statesmen, was occupied in "exploring every avenue," but what principle guided his footsteps?

More material evidence of Gladstone's changing attitude to Ireland in the autumn of 1885 is to be discovered in letters to certain colleagues and friends. In September Hugh Childers, the distinguished bearer of a name destined later to be inscribed on the page of Irish history, "a most capable administrator, a zealous colleague, wise in what the world regards as the secondary sort of wisdom and the last man to whom one would have looked for a plunge,"<sup>2</sup> wrote to Gladstone seeking his approval for a "tolerably full-fledged scheme of Home Rule." Gladstone replied,<sup>3</sup> "I have a decided sympathy with the general scope and spirit of your proposed declaration

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 234.

<sup>2</sup> Morley, *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> September 28, 1885.

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about Ireland. If I offer any observations, they are meant to be simply in furtherance of your purpose."

The observations suggested that Childers, while stating his readiness to consider an Irish legislature for all matters not of imperial concern should mention the details "veiled in language not such as to commit you." All the evidence available suggests that this response to Childers reflects with reasonable accuracy the state of Gladstone's opinion on Ireland at this time. He foresaw the necessity of a separate Parliament in Dublin, but he was determined that his conviction should not be made known to the public.

Why then did Gladstone consider secrecy imperative? Was it merely because he delighted to play the rôle of a prophet whose inspired message pronounced at the appropriate hour would show his followers the road to the promised land? Certainly such a rôle afforded him pleasure, and the intricate sentences of the Midlothian address admirably fulfilled the design of mystifying his audience. When he spoke on the legislative union he was true to the portrait which Lytton Strachey<sup>1</sup> was one day to paint with epigrammatic malice; the portrait of a man the fibre of whose being was speech, and when he spoke the ambiguity of ambiguity was revealed. The long winding sentences with their vast burden of subtle complicated qualifications befogged the mind like clouds and like clouds, too, dropped their thunderbolts. "I believe history and posterity," said Gladstone, "will consign to disgrace the name and memory of every man, be he who he may, and on whichever side of the channel he may dwell, that having power to aid in an equitable settlement between Ireland and Great Britain, shall use that power not to aid but to prevent or to retard." And so the speech rolls on, profuse in language, impressive in scope but indecisive on the one question it discussed, and so either admitting or excluding a policy of Home Rule as the hearer might care to think. The performance was

<sup>1</sup> *Eminent Victorians*, pp. 272-3.



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he more creditable in as much as Gladstone instead of minimizing, magnified the gravity of the Irish Question.

But Gladstone had more substantial reasons for secrecy. He might favour Home Rule, but he was extremely averse to anything that might resemble "bidding" between the two English parties for Irish votes. "Apart from the terms Whig and Tory there is one thing," he said in a memorable appeal, "that I would impress upon you and it is this. It will be a vital danger to the country and to the Empire if at a time when a demand from Ireland for larger powers of self-government is to be dealt with there is not in Parliament a party totally independent of the Irish vote."<sup>1</sup> And he added a little later, "for a government in a minority to deal with the Irish Question would not be safe." If bidding was to be avoided, then Gladstone argued that proposals for Irish reform should come from the Government of the day. "It is not," he wrote to Lord Rosebery, "the province of the person leading the party in opposition to frame and produce before the public detailed schemes"<sup>2</sup> of such importance. From these premises he argued that his support of Home Rule, would destroy all reasonable hope of its adoption. Such a plan proposed by the Liberal party would have to face the opposition of the Tories *en bloc*, and this opposition and "the appeals with which it will be accompanied," he added prophetically, "will render the carrying of the measure, difficult even by a united Liberal party, hopeless, should there be serious defection." He concluded, "The idea of constituting a legislature for Ireland . . . will cause a mighty heave in the body politic. It will be as difficult to carry the Liberal party and the two British nations in favour of a legislature for Ireland, as it was easy to carry them in the case of Irish disestablishment."

The fear of "bidding" for the Irish vote, the danger of arousing uncompromising and unrelenting Tory opposition

<sup>1</sup> November 9, 1885. Quoted in Morley, *op. cit.*, vol. III, pp. 236-7.

<sup>2</sup> Letter dated November 13, 1885.

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to all proposals for Irish self-government—these were the negative reasons for Gladstone's silence in 1885. That they were reinforced by something more positive is indicated by some casual references in letters published in Morley's biography, and is confirmed by the publication, in Mr. Ensor's *England, 1870-1914*, of some hitherto unpublished documents in the Gladstone papers.<sup>1</sup> From this evidence it becomes clear that Gladstone, reluctant to embark on so doubtful a venture at the age of seventy-six, hoped that Lord Salisbury, despite the opposition of the old Tories, would carry Home Rule with Liberal and Nationalist support. Such a prospect was not entirely improbable. Parnell's negotiations with Salisbury were known to Gladstone from information supplied by Parnell himself. Though the actual content was not revealed the conversations could concern only one subject—the measure of self-government to be granted to Ireland. Parnell attempted to secure better terms from Gladstone but Gladstone's response was decided.

I am aware of . . . the altered attitude of the Tory Party, and I presume its heightened bidding. It is right I should say that into any counter-bidding of any sort against Lord R. Churchill I for one cannot enter.<sup>2</sup>

This firm and high-principled refusal to bid against the Conservative Government naturally induced Parnell to continue the Carnarvon-Salisbury conversations. But when invited by Parnell (through Mrs. O'Shea) in late October to consider a paper on Home Rule policy, Gladstone drafted two replies; the first was never sent; the second, which Parnell received a few days before the election, was entirely non-committal. The first draft, after reminding Parnell that Gladstone could not enter into competition with the Conservatives "upon the question of how much or how little can be done for Ireland in the way of self-government," continues:

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., vide Appendix A, p. 558 seq.

<sup>2</sup> Dated August 8th.

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Further I have seen it argued that Mr. Parnell and his allies ought to seek a settlement of this Question from the party now in office, and I am not at all inclined to dissent from this opinion, for I bear in mind the history of the years 1829, 1846 and 1867 as illustrative of the respective capacity of the two parties to deal under certain circumstances with sharply controverted matters. In this view no question can arise from those connected with the Liberal Party until the Ministers have given their reply upon a subject which they are well entitled to have submitted to them.

It is easy to understand why this too revealing draft was never sent, for Gladstone's idea was quite simply that of an understanding between the two English parties to enact an Irish settlement with some, but not undue regard for Irish wishes. The proposed settlement, typically Liberal in conception, was also to be typically Liberal in execution. For while Tories might conceive of coercion as a system of government, Liberals preferred something more constructive, but at the same time something that accorded with the Liberal, as distinct from the Irish, conception of how Ireland should be governed.

Gladstone, influenced by the precedents of Catholic Emancipation (1829), of the Repeal of the Corn Laws (1846), of the Second Reform Bill (1867), considered that the repeal of the Union could most surely be carried by a Conservative Government supported by Liberal votes against the defection of the extremist Tories. And that belief underlay both his reluctance to take office and his long silence on the question of Home Rule. Lord Salisbury, too, had thought of a "forward" policy. But whilst Gladstone might contemplate disruption in Tory ranks not without some satisfaction, Salisbury pondered the fate of Peel in '46 and remembered Lord Randolph, his brilliant and ambitious lieutenant so admirably equipped to play the part of Disraeli.<sup>1</sup> But in any event, the Conservative party in 1885 was so different in character from

<sup>1</sup> Vide, Mr. Ensor's opinion, *op. cit.*, Appendix A, pp. 558-62.

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that of half a century or even twenty years earlier as to render illusory any prospect of executing such a manœuvre with success. Gladstone might well have remembered that while historians often repeat themselves, history never does.

The result of the election put a very different complexion on Salisbury's pact and Gladstone's reticence alike. For the Nationalists, though returned with immensely increased forces, were not strong enough to maintain the Conservatives in office. Pressure from within the party urged Salisbury to drop his allies, at all times uncongenial and now of slight Parliamentary value. At the same time Parnell approached Gladstone once more. The veteran leader, still anxious to retain the Conservatives in office, realized that only the most discreet reserve on his side could induce the Conservative Premier to sponsor a "forward" Irish policy. A Conservative-Nationalist majority had not materialized, but Gladstone still nursed the hope that Salisbury might play the rôle of Peel. This prospect was finally shattered when Herbert Gladstone by one costly indiscretion destroyed the harvest his father hoped to reap. The details of the son's unhappy disclosure are of no interest in comparison with the one plain fact that Herbert Gladstone inadvertently communicated to the press the news of his father's conversion to Home Rule. Denial and subterfuge were no longer possible. The news published to the world on December 17, 1885, heralded the most dramatic party conflict of the century.

Lord Salisbury saw the Hawarden kite flying in the sky and he hastened to drop his compromising allies; Lord Hartington saw it too, and he warned Gladstone of the coming breach; Chamberlain observed it with doubt and irritation; and Parnell watched it, another kingmaker determined not to perish on a later Barnet field. Gladstone, secluded at Hawarden, saw it too, saw the final frustration of his slowly maturing plans and yet with a resolute determination, remarkable indeed in a man entering on his seventy-seventh year, prepared to convert the

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country and his party to the policy of Home Rule for Ireland. It was suggestive that on the evening of the fatal day, December 17, 1885, while the son, in staccato sentences and an unusual metaphor recorded in his diary:

Fat all in the fire. *Standard* publishes another triumph for Mr. G. Evening papers and telegraph agencies go wild. Hawarden flooded with telegrams and all the world agog. The W.P.A. has sent (*sic*) the whole cat out. Father quite compos.<sup>1</sup>

The father in his diary refers but casually to "telegrams on Irish rumour" and concludes "worked much on the MSS. Huxley controversy." The dialectical embers kindled by the question of the Gadarene swine were not to be damped down even by the events of this unfortunate day.

### THE HOME RULE GOVERNMENT

Gladstone formed his third Cabinet on February 3, 1886. His conversion to Home Rule was no longer a secret, but the public and indeed some of his colleagues still remained unaware of the measure of Home Rule to be conceded. A heavy penalty was now to be exacted for the well-intentioned but unfortunate tactics of the previous year. Gladstone's apparently sudden conversion threw into opposition men who otherwise might have been conciliated. Of his leading colleagues, Chamberlain, Hartington, Bright, Harcourt, Selborne and James, only Harcourt and Chamberlain joined the Cabinet, and within two months Chamberlain had resigned. Yet the Cabinet was not unimpressive. Harcourt became Chancellor of the Exchequer, Hugh Childers Home Secretary, Lord Rosebery went to the Foreign Office, and Lord Spencer, recognizing that firm government was now impractical, accepted the Lord Presidency of the Council as token of his highly significant conversion. John Morley, a most ardent Home Ruler, accepted

<sup>1</sup> Lord Gladstone, *After Thirty Years*, pp. 312-13.

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the thankless post of Chief Secretary. When Bright met him for the first time in the Lobby after his appointment he said, "Do you know what I say about you?"—"What do you say?"—"I keep wondering whether it is courage or folly in you." Morley speculated pleasantly on whether the question was prompted by good nature or good manners. But Huxley expressed himself unambiguously. Having "his own quarrels with Mr. Gladstone about Gadarene swine and other critical affairs," as the agnostic Morley happily records, Huxley's low opinion of the Prime Minister may perhaps be discounted. "Ah, he is sending you to Ireland," Huxley remarked, "as he sent Gordon to Khartoum. I advise you to look out for yourself. That's all."<sup>1</sup>

With the notable exception of Chamberlain all the leading members of the Cabinet were strong supporters of Home Rule and carried with them the great bulk of the Liberal party. Despite the secession of Whigs and Radicals, despite the sun-dering of old and valued friendships as that between Morley and Chamberlain, the Liberals fought the battle of Home Rule with a vigour and vitality that made the struggle the most memorable in the annals of English parliamentary history. Above all the veteran Prime Minister with unflagging energy and unswerving courage set off on his last crusade. The Bill might be defeated, but the Liberals, having inscribed it on their banner, were determined that once for all the spirit of Anglo-Irish relations was to be changed. Sir William Harcourt spoke no more than the sober truth when he warned the Unionists:

You may kill this Bill but its record will remain. The history of England and Ireland can never be as if this offer had never been made. You may kill it now but it will ever haunt your festivals of coercion."<sup>2</sup>

No better illustration of the strength of the case for Home Rule is to be found than the presence of men of such widely

<sup>1</sup> Morley, *Recollections*, vol. 1, pp. 221-2.    <sup>2</sup> *Hansard*, vol. ccciv, col. 1458.

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different outlook as Spencer, Morley and Rosebery in a Cabinet pledged to enact a measure so profoundly distasteful to the vast majority of Englishmen. Moreover, the support that was given to Gladstone was ungrudging even though the reason for it varied. Lord Spencer was a Home Ruler because party politics made a prolonged trial of resolute government impossible; Morley because it appeared the just solution of the Irish Question; Lord Rosebery because he thought it a rather unpleasant necessity. Few Liberals, indeed, were able to preserve the detachment essential to judging the policy on its merits. The split in the party produced recriminations that inevitably warped men's verdicts. The advocacy of Home Rule did not come easily to Liberals who had supported Gladstone in opposing Home Rule only a few years earlier. Yet the majority followed Gladstone because they suspected, what history has confirmed, that he was right.

The choice of a young Liberal elected to Parliament for the first time in November 1885, unprejudiced, unshackled by the past, scrupulous, without ambition, who felt it was open to him without inconsistency to be either a Home Ruler or a Unionist, has a more than personal significance. His name was Edward Grey, better remembered as Lord Grey of Fallodon. "That a man of Mr. Gladstone's importance should advocate Home Rule was a fact so arresting," he recalled later, "as to make me feel the necessity for thought: the suddenness of the change puzzled and made me doubt. Then I came across the articles written by John Morley in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. . . . They seemed irresistible in their argument that coercion was not, under modern conditions, possible as a permanent system of governing Ireland. The only alternative was Home Rule. I was intellectually convinced."<sup>1</sup>

Lord Rosebery, too, upon whom Gladstone, much to Chamberlain's chagrin, had showered high praises that marked him out for the Liberal succession, too, was intellectually but

<sup>1</sup> *Twenty-Five Years*, pp. xxvii-viii.

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reluctantly converted to Home Rule. His reasoning, typical product of the mind of this gifted political amateur, was founded on illusions. "I detest separation," he wrote to Reginald Brett, "and feel that nothing could make me agree to it. Home Rule, however, is a necessity both for us and for the Irish. They will have it within two years, at the latest, Scotland will follow and then England. When that is accomplished Imperial Federation will cease to be a dream."<sup>1</sup> In public speeches he struck a stirring note.

"Are you as weary as we are," he said to the electors of Glasgow, "of that fatal and dreary policy of giving Ireland everything except that which she wants and that which according to every principle of Liberalism . . . she has a right to obtain."

But more than thirty eventful years were to pass before the English people finally tired of that fatal policy.

### THE SECESSION OF THE WHIGS

When an historian has explained history in neatly documented pages, all the events of the past slip into place as links in an unbreakable chain. One wonders, not why a thing happened, but merely why contemporaries were so stupid as not to see that it was inevitable. And yet such an event as the defeat of the first Home Rule Bill does give rise to doubts. If Gladstone had not maintained his unprofitable silence in the autumn of '85, even if later he had been more conciliatory to his colleagues, above all to Chamberlain, if his son had not been indiscreet, or if Parnell had not thrown the Irish vote on the Conservative side, would the Bill have been defeated by thirty votes? And if it had not been defeated might not the Irish Question have pursued a happier and a more peaceful way to the same goal as it has reached by more devious paths to-day. Idle perhaps to speculate on what might have been,

<sup>1</sup> Crewe, *Lord Rosebery*, vol. i, pp. 279-80.



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but not unprofitable to ponder the pardonable though not inevitable mistakes of English statesmen—and of an Irish leader in one of the three most critical years in the history of Anglo-Irish relations.

Gladstone was prepared for the secession of the Whigs. In his second Cabinet an uneasy balance had been preserved between Hartington and the Radical Chamberlain. Opposition even to moderate constitutional reform in Ireland had made it plain that the former would never swallow Home Rule. But their secession though expected was profoundly regretted. All Gladstone Cabinets, with the exception of the last, had a strongly aristocratic tinge. He believed the presence of such men to be an asset and once he spoke "of the old and invaluable habit of Liberal England which looked to a Liberal aristocracy and to a Liberal leisured class as the natural and therefore the best leaders of the Liberal movement." The Home Rule Bill involved the final loss of such leadership and in consequence the enduring hostility of the Lords. Before the election Hartington wrote to Gladstone explaining that while he had done as much as he could to minimize his differences with Chamberlain, he believed the hope of avoiding disruption in the party to be vain, quite regardless of any possible split on Irish policy. He urged Gladstone to take a strong and decided line against the Radicals—who in a few months were to be his allies. Towards the end of December Hartington indicated unmistakably that he could not join a Home Rule Government.<sup>1</sup> From that attitude he never wavered. He refused all Gladstone's invitations to join the Government on the ostensible ground that he disagreed fundamentally with the new Irish policy.

The secession of Hartington and his Whig followers was a more serious blow to the prestige than to the actual voting strength of the Liberal Government. Gladstone had taken

<sup>1</sup> The correspondence is published in Holland, *Life of the Duke of Devonshire*, chapter xxi.

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considerable pains to conciliate Hartington, who received in the summer of 1884 one of the earliest indications that separate legislature for Ireland would have to be considered when the Liberals returned to power.<sup>1</sup> A public statement by Gladstone before the election could only have hastened the day of disruption. Yet that the breach with Hartington should have come on Irish policy at a most critical moment, when it might have come, as indeed Hartington himself thought it should have come, on general policy one or two years earlier,<sup>2</sup> had most unfortunate reactions on Home Rule. Even in the event many of the Whig leaders as Kimberley, Spencer, Harcourt did not follow Hartington in his refusal to accept office in Gladstone's administration. Lord Granville, too, joined the Cabinet and, as his biographer tells us, "like Perithous in the Athenian legend, plunged after his king into the gulf."<sup>3</sup> This inspiring spectacle afforded no pleasure to Hartington, who supposed to the last that all the Whig leaders would support his refusal. This division in the ranks of the Whigs reinforces the conviction that Gladstone would have been wiser to effect the breach earlier. Had he been less conciliatory Hartington would have resigned on general policy and so his immense personal influence would not have been thrown with such effect in the scales against Home Rule. For if Lord Hartington was slow, he was also greatly respected both in Parliament and in the country. The weight of his opposition may not lightly be discounted. Admirers of Lytton Strachey<sup>4</sup> will recall the portrait of a man beloved by the British people "because they could be absolutely certain that he would never under any circumstances be either brilliant or subtle or surprising or impassioned or profound. As they sat listening to his speeches in which considerations of solid plainness succeeded one another with complete flatness, they became involved and supported by the

<sup>1</sup> Fitzmaurice, *Life of Lord Granville*, vol. II, p. 461.

<sup>2</sup> Vide, Holland, op. cit., vol. II, pp. 123, 124.

<sup>3</sup> Fitzmaurice, op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> *Eminent Victorians*, pp. 285-7.

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colossal tedium." But that portrait would not lead us to suppose that Lord Hartington, one of the ablest debaters of the day, delivered perhaps the most effective denunciation of the Home Rule Bill in the House. The speech was ponderous, but even in the dusty columns of *Hansard* the words of this Anglo-Irish landlord convey—it is a remarkable achievement—an impression of cool, judicial, detachment. There is no attempt to minimize the consequences of rejection, merely a balanced but authoritative statement of the case against change. Herbert Gladstone<sup>1</sup> records that Hartington's failure to form any progressive views on the Irish Question was to many who had to part from him, little less than a tragedy. He had something in common with Parnell, a reticence, a certain aristocratic disdain best described by Harcourt as "Hartington's you-be-damned-ness." Once Tim Healy was flashing out a bitter attack. Hartington was on the front opposition bench with his hat over his eyes apparently asleep. Healy turned on him suddenly: "There is the noble Marquis like a pike at the bottom of a pool." Hartington's hat never stirred but his whole body shook with laughter. The opposition acquired no mean recruit when this man of solid ability, the heir to a great Whig dukedom, crossed the floor of the House.

### THE SECESSION OF THE RADICALS

Mr. Gladstone, who had a profound distaste for Radicals, never understood Joseph Chamberlain. He shared to the full Parnell's illusion that Chamberlain was a friend of self-government. The mistake indeed was pardonable. Chamberlain had taken an active part in securing the release of Parnell from Kilmainham, he had protested against coercion, he absented himself from a banquet in honour of his colleague Lord Spencer, he had opened the electoral campaign of 1885 with

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 175.

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the famous declaration: "The pacification of Ireland at this moment depends, I believe, on the concession to Ireland of the right to govern itself in the matter of its purely domestic business. Is it not discreditable to us that even now it is only by unconstitutional means that we are able to secure peace and order in one portion of Her Majesty's dominions? It is a system as completely centralized and bureaucratic as that with which Russia governs Poland or as that which prevailed in Venice under Austrian rule. An Irishman at this moment cannot move or step . . . without being confronted with, controlled by an English official appointed by a foreign government and without a shade or shadow of representative authority. I say the time has come to reform altogether the absurd and irritating anachronism known as Dublin Castle."<sup>1</sup>

Is it surprising that even politicians so experienced as Gladstone and Parnell failed to understand that such incisive language concealed unrelenting opposition to Home Rule? Yet the failure was to prove costly indeed, and gibing references in debate to those eloquent sentences on Poland and Venice were to provide indifferent compensation for the loss of radical votes.

The rather nice distinction which Chamberlain drew between his own proposals for federal devolution and Gladstone's Home Rule policy looks singularly unreal now, when Chamberlain's son has signed a pact with an Ireland that is a sovereign, independent State.<sup>2</sup> Chamberlain insisted upon the validity of this distinction even to the point of resignation from the Cabinet in April. It is undeniable, too, that he was treated with scant consideration by Gladstone. Had the latter been less secretive, had he consulted Chamberlain at the time of his conversion to Home Rule, persuasion might have yielded happier fruits.

But doubts intrude, Chamberlain was ambitious; he had

<sup>1</sup> Speech of June 17, 1885. Quoted Morley, *Gladstone*, vol. III, p. 233-4.

<sup>2</sup> The 1938 Agreement.

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resented the compliments showered on Rosebery, he was jealous of Morley's promotion; and while it would be ungenerous to say that the motives which drove him into opposition were those of an ambitious self-seeking man, yet it is difficult to believe that his rigid insistence upon a distinction between Home Rule and Federal devolution was not powerfully reinforced by a growing personal antagonism to the Liberal leader. Gladstone, the most generous of opponents, said of Chamberlain in the House of Commons, "He has trimmed his vessel, he has touched his rudder in such a masterly way that in whichever direction the winds of heaven may blow they must fill his sails." The passage of time, the distinguished national record of the Chamberlains have combined to modify, but not to reverse, that verdict.

The defection was final. Not only was Chamberlain's opposition to Home Rule bitter and unrelenting for the remainder of his life, not only were his speeches in Parliament decisive, but the loss of the Radical vote in industrial England was a blow from which the Liberal party never recovered. As Mr. Ensor has pointed out, London and Lancashire as well as Birmingham voted heavily against Home Rule in subsequent elections. The radicalism dominant behind Gladstone after 1886 was that of districts hitherto in the background. The Liberal party came to depend visibly on the Celtic fringe and save in the landslide election of 1906 the party never again won an English majority.<sup>1</sup> Parnell was right when he said Chamberlain had killed Home Rule and to-day we may add that he signed the death warrant of the Liberal party as well.

The intervention of John Bright, less spectacular than that of Chamberlain, was but little less effective. A contemporary and personal friend of Gladstone, a champion of Ireland in earlier days when her English friends were few indeed, Bright was an elder statesman whose prestige was second only to that of the great Liberal leader. Curiously enough the influence

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 207.

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he exercised on the fortunes of Home Rule was due to the entirely mistaken belief that he had an open mind on Irish policy. Nothing could have been further from the truth. When he first heard of Home Rule he condemned it out of hand, saying that to have two legislative assemblies in the United Kingdom would be "an intolerable mischief."<sup>1</sup> His unflattering opinion of Irishmen strengthened his conviction. "Tell the merchant," he said, "he must not rely for one moment on Home Rule for any one thing that is wise or good, nor indeed on any combination of Irishmen." Parnell he termed a rebel and early in '86 he counselled Chamberlain, "If the *rebel* party were not *rebels* an arrangement would not be difficult, but with *rebels*, how can one negotiate with or trust them." To his friend Gladstone he was entirely frank, stating in May 1886, "I think your Bill is full of complexity and gives no hope." Yet in spite of these opinions Bright was invited to the famous conference in Committee Room 15—invitations to which were issued not to unequivocal opponents of Home Rule as Lord Hartington but to "Liberal members who being in favour of some sort of autonomy for Ireland" disapproved of the terms of Gladstone's Bill. Bright did not go, but sent a letter expressing his own intention of voting against the Bill on the second reading. Chamberlain read out the letter and afterwards admitted that its effect on the "trimmers" was decisive. John Bright had hammered another nail in the coffin of Home Rule—and yet Gladstone felt no personal resentment. A chance meeting in a London street some two years after the defeat of Home Rule brought these two venerable survivors of early Victorian England face to face. John Bright recorded the conversation in his diary and recorded, too, that at parting Gladstone "took his glove off to shake hands with me as indicating more cordiality of feeling." But Joseph Chamberlain was not forgiven.

<sup>1</sup> Letter of January 20, 1872. This and following extracts taken from letters printed in G. M. Trevelyan's *John Bright*, pp. 444-8.

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### PARNELL'S MISCALCULATIONS

In the autumn of 1885 Parnell said that if the English would not concede self-government at any rate the Irish would determine which English party was to hold office. In the event such a prospect was not fulfilled, for while Parnell could turn either Conservatives or Liberals out after the election he could keep only the Liberals in. This simple fact imposed a serious limitation on his independence, a limitation that made an understanding with the Liberals a necessity. So it was only in a negative sense that the Nationalists controlled the parliamentary destinies of the British Isles in 1886.

Parnell had miscalculated in anticipating that the Nationalists would hold an unrestricted balance of power in the new Parliament. His political judgment had been more seriously at fault in counselling that the Irish vote should be cast on the Conservative side. Contemporary politicians as Salisbury and Morley reckoned that the Irish vote was worth twenty-five to forty seats and there is no reason to doubt their estimate. Parnell's election manifesto in handing over these seats to the Conservatives had in fact insured the defeat of Home Rule in the Commons. Even if only twenty-five seats had been decided by the Irish vote they would have been sufficient to reverse the verdict in the House some six months later. To all appearances the Irish leader had made the one disastrous political blunder of his career—and yet one hesitates to condemn, for Parnell had to weigh imponderables whose substance defies analysis to this day. Had he thrown the Irish vote on the Liberal side then he must anticipate the defeat of Home Rule in the Lords; and in addition a possible Liberal majority over Conservatives and Nationalists combined. Had the latter contingency materialized Gladstone doubtless would have been forced either to modify his plans in order to conciliate colleagues, or else to resign the leadership of the party. In either event the course of Irish self-government would have

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been retarded. Then again Parnell had reached an explicit understanding with Salisbury; Gladstone had maintained a mystifying silence. When Parnell made his choice the political prospect was unusually obscure. That he miscalculated is certain; what remains doubtful is whether any decision taken by the Irish leader could have exercised a decisive influence on the destiny of the Home Rule Bill.

The more closely the political scene of 1886 is examined, the stronger grows the conviction that even the most skilful use of the Irish votes could not ensure the repeal of the Union. For in the last analysis the decision lay not with Parnell but with the English parties. Parnell had built up a coherent, disciplined phalanx pledged to the cause of Home Rule. It was a remarkable achievement—but it did not alter the decisive fact that the Nationalists could never hope to return more than a small minority of members to the House of Commons. Eighty-six members followed the “uncrowned king” to Westminster after the election, but that number represented the high tide of Nationalist success. The eighty-six of '86 was not destined to be surpassed. So it was by strategy alone that Parnell could hope to decide the issue of the day; and strategy was not enough.

### THE LIBERAL-NATIONALIST ENTENTE

While the defeat of the Home Rule Bill may not in justice be attributed to Parnell's decision to throw the Irish vote on the Conservative side at the election, yet that decision had unhappy consequences. The Irish manifesto threw the Liberals, in constituencies where there was an Irish vote, into direct and angry antagonism to the Irish cause and its leaders. Passions were roused, things were said that were not easily forgotten, and in consequence, as Morley reminds us, the task of conversion in 1886, difficult in any case, was made a thousand times more difficult still by the arguments and antipathies of



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the electoral battle of 1885.<sup>1</sup> The record of Gladstone's second administration, depicted in colourful electoral phrases, was in itself sufficient to widen the gulf between Liberals and Nationalists.

Such recriminations heralded the birth of the Liberal-Nationalist entente. While it never attained the rigidity of a formal alliance yet the understanding between the two parties was destined to endure. It was a most important political consequence of the events of 1886.

The strength of the Liberal-Nationalist entente was tested in the summer of 1886. For Gladstone, defeated by thirty votes on the second reading of the Home Rule Bill on June 8, 1886, decided to appeal to the country. The new allies fared badly. Three hundred and ninety-four seats fell to the Unionists (a number which includes 78 dissentient Liberals), whilst Home Rule mustered but 276 supporters, made up of 191 Liberals and 85 Nationalists. The verdict was decisive, for it showed that the country was more opposed to Home Rule than the House. Many reasons are advanced to explain the aversion of Englishmen to Home Rule. Racial and religious antipathies aroused by the Ulster Question, the English working man's dislike of Irish competitors in the labour market, the growing Imperialist reaction, a characteristic distrust of a final and radical solution of a political question all contributed to the result. But perhaps the decisive blow was struck by the territorial aristocracy. The English people, as Bagehot so wisely remarked, were a "deferential people." For the first time at this election a virtually united peerage, fighting for the future of the landed interest in Ireland, threw its influence in the scale against the Liberal party. The support of the great Whig magnates had passed under the lead of Hartington from Liberals to Conservatives, and this defection involved a loss of votes in rural constituencies that could be ill afforded.

Despite the double disaster of defeat in the Commons and

<sup>1</sup> *Gladstone*, vol. III, pp. 244-5.

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defeat in the country, the Liberal party never wavered in its allegiance to Home Rule. Yet its leaders lived under no illusions. "You have no regrets at the course we took?" enquired Gladstone some four years later. "None," replied John Morley, "none. It was inevitable. I have never doubted. That does not prevent bitter lamentation that inevitable it was."

After 1886 a reaction set in and electoral omens improved. By the late autumn of 1890 the "quicksilver stood delightfully high" in the Liberal barometer, but the hopes of Home Rulers were dashed in a moment by the news of Parnell's fall. History was ransacked for a parallel. The Irish leader was Mirabeau, in whom private fault destroyed a saviour of his country. He was Robespierre brought to the scaffold at Thermidor. He was the Satan of *Paradise Lost* "hurled with hideous ruin and combustion down."<sup>1</sup> But these unromantic comparisons of Victorian England could not banish uneasy speculation from the minds of Liberals trying to counteract the fissiparous character of the Nationalist party and understanding full well that the enactment of Home Rule was now indefinitely postponed.

Mr. Gladstone formed a fourth Cabinet in August 1892, he introduced a second Home Rule Bill, it passed the Commons to be thrown out by the Lords. But in fact no progress had been made, for faith had been dimmed by disaster, the desire for resolute action had gone and the Liberal Cabinet declined the risk of an appeal to the people, as Gladstone wished, to challenge the veto of the Lords. Too well they remembered the summer of 1886. Morley in Dublin once again as Chief Secretary, in recalling a meeting with Asquith on October 25, 1893, reflects the pessimism of the time: "A truly satisfactory man," he noted. "Takes my view and the view of everyone else, I should think, that there was never a political prospect so obscure, if only all political prospects were not obscure. We agreed that the chance of a Liberal majority at the general

<sup>1</sup> Morley, *Recollections*, vol. 1, p. 251.

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election is uncommonly slender. 'Why did they give us one at the last election?' said Asquith. We agreed that a worse stroke of luck than such a majority had never befallen anyone."<sup>1</sup> When Morley, the man to whom Parnell paid so unique a tribute in the last speech he ever made in England, voices such sentiments then one understands the price exacted of the Liberal party for its support of Home Rule.

The Liberal party had been converted by Gladstone and while he remained leader, Home Rule was assured of unwavering support. His devotion to this solution of the Irish Question was well-nigh fanatical in its intensity. M. Waddington, the French Ambassador to the Court of St. James's, lamented Gladstone's absorption. In earlier days they could discuss other subjects—Gladstone would always rise to Homer or some other literary topic, but now even Homer failed and there was only Ireland, always Ireland. While he was brilliant as ever in point of language, his judgment, thought M. Waddington, was impaired, for one idea had full possession of his mind.<sup>2</sup> Even John Morley, hurriedly though he pushed aside the impious thought, felt that the G.O.M.'s undeviating fixity of purpose hindered the work of his last administration. It is probable indeed that a more flexible outlook on Ireland would have proved more popular in the House—but then Home Rule would not have been so ineffaceably inscribed on the creed of the Liberal party. For the last seven years of his political life Gladstone had lived wholly for the Irish Question, and though in 1892 he resigned ostensibly on another issue, it was really because his colleagues denied him the opportunity of a last electoral battle on Home Rule. He was then in his eighty-fifth year. "Resigned!" he said in after years, "I did not resign. I was put out." Asquith has left a record of Gladstone's last Cabinet. Ministers were deeply moved and some of them on the verge of tears. Harcourt

<sup>1</sup> Morley, *Recollections*, vol. i, pp. 373-4.

<sup>2</sup> Vide, Trevelyan, *Life of Bright*, p. 460.

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“produced from his box and proceeded to read a well-thumbed MS. of highly elaborate eulogy.” Mr. Gladstone “looked on with hooded eyes and tightened lips,” and was so little mollified that in after days he was accustomed to speak of this meeting as the “blubbering cabinet.”<sup>1</sup> On Home Rule Gladstone in truth had never wavered, and his successors, living under the shadow of a great name, could not be unmindful of an ideal which had won the unstinted loyalty of the greatest of Liberal statesmen.

So the entente between Liberals and Nationalists, cordial at times but more often uneasy, continued to the last. Home Rule constituted the only bond of union between these strangely assorted allies and many of the planks in the Liberal programme at the landslide election of 1906 were as repellent to Nationalists as to Unionists. No Irish sympathies were stirred by the triumph song of Liberalism.

The Churchman and the brewer we will drive them from  
the land,

For the Nonconformist children are marching hand in hand.

For in the Ireland of 1906 as in the Ireland of to-day bishops are fashionable and brewers the most valued of citizens. Yet despite the wide gulf in political outlook of which such differences are symbolic, Campbell-Bannerman reaffirmed, in defiance of Rosebery, the Liberal allegiance to Home Rule. Lord Randolph Churchill was thinking of Gladstone when he challenged Chamberlain: “That is the man you have deserted. How could you do it?” The Liberal party could not—and when one reads again the moving eloquence of Gladstone’s final appeal for the passage of the first Home Rule Bill its loyalty seems justified indeed—

Ireland stands at your bar expectant, hopeful, almost  
suppliant. Her words are the words of truth and soberness.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Spender and Asquith, *Life of Lord Oxford and Asquith*, vol. 1, pp. 89–90.

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She asks a blessed oblivion of the past, and in that oblivion our interest is deeper even than hers. You have been asked to-night to abide by the traditions of which we are the heirs. What traditions? The Irish traditions? Go into the length and breadth of the world, ransack the literature of all countries, find if you can, a single voice, a single book, in which the conduct of England towards Ireland is anywhere treated except with profound and bitter condemnation. Are these the traditions by which men are exhorted to stand? No, they are a sad exception to the glory of our country. They are a broad black blot upon the pages of its history; and what we want to do is to stand by the traditions of which we are the heirs in all matters except our relations with Ireland . . .

### EPILOGUE

In the long unhappy history of Anglo-Irish relations only one event is more truly tragic than the rejection of Home Rule in 1886. The opportunity of settlement had come, perhaps the greatest of English statesmen was ready to grasp it—and yet the unique chance was destroyed by a failure in perception whose consequences not even time can wholly repair. Yet the conflict of 1885-6 and the circumstances which assisted the Liberal conversion are almost unknown to-day. This chapter is no more than an attempt to review in perspective the events of a seminal year in English as in Irish history. Partly because the harvest never ripened, but still more because of the changed political outlook of the post-war generation, the story of Home Rule is dismissed alternately with amused condescension or bitter contempt. Left-wing intellectuals in England, whose knowledge of the Irish Question could not be termed intimate by the friendliest of critics, maintain that the Gladstonian solution was superficial. For Gladstone, blissfully unaware of the economic basis of politics, suffered from the naive illusion that the Anglo-Irish question was in fact, as in appearance, a political problem! So elementary a mistake would not,

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of course, have been made by anyone schooled in the precepts of dialectical materialism. Then on the other hand, Irish opinion, recalling all too well that the Nationalist party failed to achieve the one thing that could have justified its long sojourn at Westminster, views Home Rule in retrospect as a carrot dangled by scheming English politicians before the nose of the Irish Donkey—a carrot always to be chased but never to be eaten. Neither criticism is entirely without foundation, yet both are unprofitable. Gladstone's policy can be judged only in relation to the Liberal principles which he professed. It is as idle to lament that the G.O.M. viewed Irish problems with the eyes of a Liberal, not of a Marxist, nor of an Irish Nationalist, as it was for Wordsworth to deplore that

A primrose by the river's brim  
A yellow primrose was to him  
And it was nothing more.

To say that Liberal policy must be viewed in relation to Liberal principles is not to say that it offered the ideal solution of the Irish Question. While it is my belief that the enactment of Home Rule in 1886 (but not in 1914) would have allowed the peaceful re-emergence of an unpartitioned Irish nation, yet it is clear too that the renaissance of an Irish civilization would not have afforded unmixed pleasure to Liberals. For in common with the vast majority of their fellow countrymen they did not comprehend the existence of an Irish mind and a distinctive Irish outlook. Liberals looked on the problem of Ireland as the great Whig historian once looked on those of India. As it was right, in Macaulay's eyes, that natives of the higher ranks should be educated for positions of responsibility in the English services, so it was right too that the Indians should be fitted for their future in a way which, intellectually, meant to detach them from their past and to graft them, if they could be grafted, on the stock of Western science and culture. "The sceptre may pass from us. Victory may

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be inconstant to our arms. But there are triumphs which are followed by no reverse. There is an Empire exempt from all natural causes of decay. Those triumphs are the pacific triumphs of reason over barbarism; that empire is the imperishable empire of our arts and our morals, our literature and our laws.”<sup>1</sup> Irish government was viewed with the same air of confident superiority, with the same lack of instinctive sympathy for another and an older civilization. The intentions of Liberals toward Ireland were good indeed, but they were good with something of the terrible devastating goodness of the unimaginative. The Gaelic League was a not unfitting reminder of the existence of an older heritage.

Though English Liberals and Irish Nationalists might see the distant scene in sharply contrasted colours, yet they were united in their immediate aim. Could that aim have been won, and could courageous statesmanship have achieved the final settlement of an age-long injustice, future divisions could never have assumed the same bitter intensity. But it was not to be. The two parties which united in support of Home Rule in 1886 were to survive for but thirty years, and then in 1916 in the midst of a world war the one was to receive a wound from which it was destined to perish ignobly; the other to be the unnoticed and unlamented victim of an Easter Rising in the streets of that city to which Parnell had aspired to restore the dignity of a National Parliament.

<sup>1</sup> This is quoted in G. M. Young's Introduction to *Select Speeches of Macaulay* in the World's Classics.

CHAPTER VI

*The Ulster Question, 1886-1938.*  
*The Three Critical Years*

"The sound of fight is silent long  
That began the ancient wrong;  
Long the voice of tears is still  
That wept of old the endless ill.  
In my heart it has not died. . . ."

A. E. HOUSMAN

IF the Ulster Question were not one of the tragedies of history it might well be regarded as one of the most remarkable of its curiosities. The intensity of political and religious divisions in that province has been equalled and indeed surpassed in other countries at other times; the vivid and enduring mistrust of a minority for government by the majority of their fellow-countrymen is the consequence of a historical process familiar to many continental peoples; but nowhere else are the divisions of other days used with such final effect to determine the issues of contemporary politics—issues to which they bear no relation whatever. Casual observers, frankly bewildered at the significance attached by present-day politicians in Ulster to the victory of a Dutch Prince over an English King two-and-a-half centuries ago, are tempted, like Marx, to dismiss as fantasies these

Party cries of long ago  
Still bombinans in vacuo.

But from long experience Irishmen know better. They have



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learnt to pierce that camouflage of tradition which serves so well to obscure the cold realities of Northern politics. Ha Parnell and Gladstone understood the Ulster mind some fifty years ago, Ireland would not be partitioned to-day; ha Asquith learned from the experience of 1886 he would hardly have brought Ireland to the brink of civil war in 1914, ha Irish Republicans understood it, their tactics in the critical years 1919-22 would have been far different. But the misapprehensions of English statesmen and of Irish Nationalists fostered as they were by the Ulstermen's fervent concentration on the politically irrelevant, have united to produce a Home Rule government in Northern Ireland, accepted and worked by the very party which protested so loudly against Home Rule under any guise or in any form. This result, less paradoxical in fact than in appearance, is the outcome of events which illuminate in an especial degree the more curious qualities of the Ulster Question. Gibbon, having acquired unique experience in the handling of a vast and complicated mass of material, warned historians "never to pursue the curious." Perhaps only intrinsic significance could justify a disregard of this all too frequently disregarded advice, and heretical though the doubt may seem in Ireland one is sometime tempted to wonder whether the Ulster Question could furnish such a justification.

The study of political forces in Ulster has been seriously hampered by the observations of writers and politicians who are determined at all costs to anticipate a future fashioned in suitable accord with their own frequently somewhat limited outlook. "Beaucoup de gens," observed Balzac wisely, "aiment mieux nier les dénouements que de mesurer la force des liens." A persistent aversion to recognizing the logic that has governed the recent phases of the Ulster Question is as common in Irish political thought as in those more personal affairs which inspired Balzac's aphorism. This survey is a slight attempt to redress the balance by recalling the process and by analysing

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the forces which have guided the destinies of Ulster during the past half century. Since it is not possible to describe here all the changes and chances of this eventful period it is perhaps most instructive to recall the demands of Ulster and the response that they elicited in London and in Dublin at the most critical moments of Anglo-Irish relations. This approach to the Ulster Question has the not inconsiderable advantage of bringing out in firm relief certain clear-cut, but frequently obscured, developments in the creed of Ulster Unionism.

#### 1886. ULSTER WILL FIGHT

The Ulster Question did not originate with the Unionist opposition to Home Rule, but its present-day character was moulded by the events of 1886. In that year it became for the first time unmistakably apparent that the forces in Ulster working for the division of Ireland would prove stronger in the immediate future than the forces working for union. Since the relative strength of these opposing forces had constituted the second most important question of Irish politics for the early part of the nineteenth century, the predominance of the one revealed in 1886 marks out that year as a turning point in Irish history.

The plantation of Ulster with settlers of English and Scottish birth was more successful than that of any other part of Ireland, yet these new inhabitants soon displayed an independence of character that brought them into conflict alternately with their British kinsmen and their Irish fellow-countrymen. From the day when John Milton fulminated against the Ulster settlers as "a generation of Highland thieves who, being neighbourly admitted by the courtesy of England, to hold possessions in our province, a country better than their own, have with worse faith than those heathen, proved ungrateful guests to their best friends and entertainers" to the day some century and a half later when the chief secretary seeing in the democratic

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opinions so popular in Belfast "the source of all the mischief" denounced "the levellers of the North," political opinions in Ulster have been a source of lively controversy. Differences in history and in creed have marked off the descendants of the Ulster settlers from the majority of Irishmen, but these differences in themselves did not cause the political division of the Irish nation. Too often is it forgotten to-day that less than a hundred and fifty years ago the Ulster dissenters provided some of the most notable champions of Irish parliamentary independence. In that generous national enthusiasm which illuminated the Irish political scene for two brief decades at the close of the eighteenth century, the Northern Protestants associated themselves with the demands of the Irish people and in notable measure supported the movement for Catholic Emancipation. "The Irish Protestant could never be free," said Grattan, "till the Irish Catholic ceased to be a slave." Wolfe Tone, who aspired to overthrow the privileged order in Ireland through a Union of Catholics and Dissenters, stirred an Ulster already permeated with the doctrines of the French Revolution more profoundly. The "Society of United Irishmen" formed by Tone in October 1791 had its first headquarters in Belfast. Its objects were to abolish all unnatural religious distinctions, to unite all Irishmen against the unjust influence of Great Britain, and to secure their true representation in a national Parliament. As Professor Curtis<sup>1</sup> has so justly observed, the real danger to the established order came from the democratic Presbyterians of the North.

As now in retrospect one is inclined to think that since 1886 the whole Protestant population of Ulster has been solidly anti-nationalist in sentiment, so too there is a tendency to minimize religious differences during the last two decades of the eighteenth century. In fact despite the influence of the United Irishmen, agrarian-religious feuds persisted in the Northern counties. Yet when every allowance has been made

<sup>1</sup> *History of Ireland*, chapter xvii.

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it cannot too frequently be recalled that there was a period, not long distant, when the aspirations of Ulster coincided with those of the rest of Ireland. Wolfe Tone had convinced Catholics and Dissenters alike that they "had but one common interest and one common enemy; that the depression and slavery of Ireland was produced and perpetuated by the divisions existing between them, and that consequently to assert the independence of their country and their own individual liberties it was necessary to forget all former feuds, to consolidate the entire strength of the nation and to form for the future but one people." After 1798 these seemed but the empty words of an impractical visionary, for when the crisis came mistrust was revived and that generous enthusiasm which had stirred the Irish people was supplanted by the old bitter divisions. Yet the observer of Ulster politics to-day should remember that such popular notions, transient though they appear, do not vanish as though they had never been.

While the Home Rule Bill of 1886 was in no sense the cause of sectarian divisions in Ulster it did intensify them. To the Ulster Unionist Home Rule meant government by those regarded as traditional and implacable political foes. To what lengths of opposition the Ulster Unionist would have gone if left to himself is a matter for speculation. It is clear that tact and a rare degree of imaginative statesmanship on the part of Parnell and his successors would have been necessary to overcome the Orangemen's mistrust. For it is always to be remembered that while three provinces of Ireland remained predominantly agricultural, Ulster, since the early decades of the nineteenth century, had found a new prosperity in rapid industrial expansion. As a consequence between Ulster, or more precisely between the four north-eastern counties of that province, and the rest of Ireland there exists a difference in religion, in historical outlook, in economy. Individually these contrasting elements would be of no great consequence; collectively they do provide a possible basis for division. It

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is improbable that the pressure of internal forces would have been sufficient to produce partition, though it would almost certainly have necessitated a federal rather than a unitary constitution for an independent Irish state. The intervention of the English parties accentuated the existing division and ultimately helped to make even a federal solution impossible. That intervention first assumed considerable proportions in 1886.

The growth of Belfast from a small market town with some 65,000 inhabitants, to the great industrial city of to-day provides one of the most notable tales of expansion afforded even by the age of the Industrial Revolution. To-day the population of Belfast<sup>1</sup> is six times what it was a century ago and is double what it was in 1886. This remarkable and rapid growth had political consequences which Irishmen rarely ponder. Badly housed workers, with a low standard of wages and long hours, business men and manufacturers absorbed in the task of amassing new and easily acquired wealth composed the most important classes in this expanding city. Its inhabitants were brought up in an atmosphere of sectarian strife; the educational system which might have counteracted it was here, as in the rest of Ireland, notoriously inadequate. Enlightened political guidance from the ruling classes was not forthcoming largely because the leaders of political opinion were, till the close of the century, drawn from the landowning classes, who understood little and sympathized less with the triumphs of industrialism. As a result this city, where inflammable memories still smouldered, was the prey to unreasoning passions easily played upon by demagogue and politician. Self-assertive of its wealth and achievement Belfast none the less was both mindful of its past and somewhat apprehensive of its future. "Strange to say," wrote Lord Morley,<sup>2</sup> "this great and flourishing community, where energy, intelligence and enterprise have achieved results so striking, has proved to harbour a spirit of bigotry and violence for which a parallel can hardly be found in any

<sup>1</sup> In 1937 census, 438,086.

<sup>2</sup> *Recollections*, vol. i, p. 222.

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town in Western Europe." The observation is just, but the surprise is unwarranted. It was because Belfast was a great, a flourishing and above all an expanding community that the spirit of bigotry survived in all its intensity.

Throughout the modern phase of the Irish Question religious divisions have played a dominant rôle in Ulster. This is so, not because they have constituted the vital issues, but because party leaders on either side know that religious prejudices are most easily exploited. In consequence, since 1886, religious antagonisms have hardened in accordance with the divisions of political parties. The Dissenters who attacked the privileged order at the close of the eighteenth century, the Presbyterian farmers and business men with their traditional hostility to the Episcopalian landlords buried their differences when confronted with Home Rule. The fusion was not spontaneous and was not rendered final till the destinies of Ulster had been placed in Lord Carson's hands. Yet broadly speaking, since 1886, the terms Unionist and Protestant, Nationalist and Catholic have become synonymous. Since then religious and political divisions have coincided, and by this unreal and artificial alignment of forces the history of Ulster has been moulded. One may despise the survival of medieval intolerance; one may condemn or scorn the attitude of mind which makes it possible, but one cannot ignore its existence. This is the legacy of the fierce fanaticism of the religious wars, fostered and nourished through the centuries by a chain of calamitous circumstances till at last it has become embedded as a well-nigh ineradicable habit in the Ulster mind.<sup>1</sup>

Of the 89 contested Irish seats in the election of 1885 the Nationalists won 85, mostly by overwhelming majorities. Ulster returned eighteen Nationalist against seventeen Unionists—an indication of the complexity of the Ulster problem. Here was no question of a united province resolutely resisting Home Rule—that would have allowed of a simple solution—

<sup>1</sup> Cf. my book on *The Government of Northern Ireland*, chapter vii.

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but rather of the far more difficult problem presented by a minority concentrated in the north-eastern counties of Ulster whose co-religionists in the remaining counties of the province were not inconsiderable. In 1885 the prospect of Home Rule led to sporadic rioting in Belfast. Mr. Gladstone's speech introducing the first Home Rule Bill in the House was followed immediately by speeches from the two members for County Antrim. The speakers in the name of the northern counties protested against the conception of an all-Ireland Parliament.<sup>1</sup> So soon was the gage thrown down in the House and to friend and foe alike Ulster stood revealed as the vulnerable joint in the armour of Home Rule.

Unionist statesmen had been acutely conscious of feeling in Ulster since Mr. Gladstone's public conversion to Home Rule at the end of 1885. Their interest though confessedly prompted only by a paternal solicitude for the welfare of Ulster was not diminished by the prospect of undeniable party advantage. "I decided some time ago," wrote Lord Randolph Churchill with characteristic acuteness early in 1886, "that if the G.O.M. went for Home Rule the Orange card would be the one to play. Please God, it may turn out the ace of trumps, and not a two."<sup>2</sup> Some few days after writing this letter Lord Randolph crossed to Belfast. There at a meeting of the Orange Lodge in the Ulster Hall he made a speech,<sup>3</sup> which his son has described as one of the most memorable triumphs of his life. "Now may be the time," cried Lord Randolph, "to show whether all those ceremonies and forms which are practised in the Orange Lodges are really living symbols or only idle meaningless ceremonies." The demonstrations of to-day must help to decide the wavering ministerial mind. "Like Macbeth before the murder of Duncan," proceeded Lord Randolph

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Hansard*, vol. ccciv, cols 1089-1102.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Lord Fitzgibbon, February 16, 1886, quoted in W. S. Churchill, *Life of Lord Randolph Churchill*, vol. II, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> On February 22, 1886.

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with rising eloquence, "Mr. Gladstone asks for time. Before he plunges the knife into the heart of the British Empire he asks for time—

The combat deepens; on ye brave  
Who rush to glory or the grave.  
Wave Ulster—all thy banners wave  
And charge with all thy chivalry."

In the face of so flamboyant an appeal which reached its climax in the dictum "Ulster will fight, Ulster will be right" no counsels of moderation could hope to prevail. An English statesman, lately Secretary of State for India, and soon to be Chancellor of the Exchequer, had incited Ulster to physical resistance to Home Rule. Though older Tories, scandalized and shocked that a leader of the "party of law and order" should use such language, words had been spoken that were not forgotten either in Ulster or in the Unionist party. Twenty-seven years later "Ulster will fight, Ulster will be right" was to be the accepted slogan of the Unionist party.

Because the opposition to Gladstone's Bill was tainted with an unconstitutional tinge it is not to be assumed that the Bill warranted no criticism in Ulster. On the contrary, the Prime Minister, owing to his own rather abrupt conversion to Home Rule and to the need for legislation immediately after his accession to office, had pondered insufficiently the detail of his measures. A problem of some, but not of insuperable, dimensions awaited solution in Ulster. In his Bill Mr. Gladstone simply ignored its existence. The oversight is understandable—as it was Home Rule was coupled with a complicated measure of land reform—but it was disastrous. Had some form of federalism been proposed for a limited or even indefinite period; had the Ulster Unionists been safeguarded by the express terms of the Bill; a reasonable basis for negotiation and amendment would have been provided. Lord Randolph's exuberance would thereby have been deprived of its only



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justification and Charles Spurgeon's fears for Irish Protestantism would have been substantially allayed.

For there is no doubt that this Bill in its actual form aroused uneasiness among men whose opinion could not lightly be disregarded. John Bright wrote to Gladstone in May 1886 saying, "I cannot consent to a measure which is so offensive . . . to the whole sentiment of the province of Ulster so far as its loyal and Protestant people are concerned. I cannot agree to exclude them from the protection of the Imperial Parliament."<sup>1</sup> John Bright had his faults but insincerity was not among them. The emphasis that he placed on possible discrimination against Protestants by a Home Rule government profoundly influenced the opinion of Liberal Nonconformists throughout the British Isles. It would not have been difficult for Mr. Gladstone to insert safeguards which would have removed these fears.

In Ulster itself the antipathy to Home Rule was exploited to bring the Liberal-Unionists within the Tory fold. Not all Liberals were content to become "mere circus riders in the Tory Hippodrome." A Presbyterian Minister, Mr. J. B. Armour, stated that after the 1886 election Presbyterians in all Ulster had only two representatives. Unionism in its new militant form was but a device to secure the ascendancy in the enjoyment of their privileges. "The sacred cause of Unionism is made at the present day a stalking horse to cover a multitude of political hypocrisies. I would hope that in this age of loud disputes and weak convictions, whilst we—the members of the Presbyterian Church—abstain from the new wine which is making so many stagger, we shall keep as resolutely from hysterical panic."<sup>2</sup> But the reaction to Home Rule submerged Liberalism in Ulster. Till the Wyndham Act of 1903 the Land Question gave it a *raison d'être*. After that date the process of absorption continued unchecked. It was

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Morley's *Gladstone*, vol. III, p. 327.

<sup>2</sup> W. S. Armour, *Armour of Ballymoney*, pp. 77–80.

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perhaps the most significant legacy of 1886 to Ulster. Henceforward liberalism in politics as in sentiment had no admirers in the North.

Parnell declared in the House of Commons that no single dissentient voice had been raised against the Home Rule Bill by any Irishman holding Nationalist opinions. This consensus of opinion, he argued, made impossible any half-way house between the concession of legislative autonomy to Ireland and her government as a Crown colony.<sup>1</sup> He was mistaken. There was a third possibility—*divide et impera*. So long as Irish divisions endured they could be used by the opponents of Home Rule as a justification for inaction. Ulster blocked Home Rule. Yet for Unionist statesman the Ulster Question was the *occasion*, it was not the *cause* of their opposition. It was as Lord Randolph so confidently hoped “the ace of trumps.” Sincerely opposed to a measure which was reckoned likely to promote the disintegration of the Empire, Unionist statesmen played their winning card in a spirit of light-hearted cynicism, which transgressed the spirit of the English Constitutional government and which boded ill for the future reconciliation of Irish men of different outlook and different creed.

### 1914. THE GATHERING STORM

In November 1909 Arthur Balfour resigned the leadership of the Unionist party. The succession was disputed. The two strongest candidates, Mr. Austen Chamberlain and Mr. Walter Long, both stood aside when it was understood that the choice of either would divide the party. Mr. Bonar Law was then selected. He was reputed to be a “first-class fighting man” and in his first speech delivered at the Albert Hall he lived up to this reputation. He described the Liberal Government as “humbugs,” as “artful dodgers” dealing in “cant” and

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, vol. ccciv.

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“trickery,” and going down the steep place like the Gadarene swine.<sup>1</sup>

The choice of Mr. Bonar Law as leader of the Conservative party was an event of no small moment in the history of the Ulster Question. For Mr. Bonar Law was a Scots-Canadian and a Presbyterian; his father had once occupied an Ulster manse. His sympathy with Ulster Unionism was whole-hearted, his language indiscreet. He was, wrote Sir Walter Raleigh, a man *without unction*. Sir Walter added that he liked men without unction. None the less it was most unfortunate that the leader of the Conservative party at this juncture should be a man who was always reluctant to impose any restraint on the activities of the Ulster Unionists and who at the last was prepared to pledge an English party to the unconditional support of an Irish faction. No more undignified episode is to be found in the history of Conservatism than its abandonment of all pretension in the three years before the war to be the party of “law and order.” For Mr. Bonar Law was indifferent to the existence of that nice distinction which divides conservatism from reaction, a distinction which his predecessors in the Conservative leadership had so scrupulously observed.

When Mr. Asquith moved for leave to introduce the Third Home Rule Bill he quoted in protest a passage from one of Mr. Bonar Law’s more recent utterances. “The present Government turns the House of Commons into a market-place where everything is bought and sold. In order to remain a few months longer in office His Majesty’s Government have sold the constitution. . . .” This dialogue followed:

THE PRIME MINISTER: “Am I to understand that the Right Honourable gentleman repeats here or is prepared to repeat on the floor of the House of Commons . . .?”

MR. BONAR LAW: “Yes.”

<sup>1</sup> Vide Spender, *Great Britain, Empire and Commonwealth*, p. 416.

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THE PRIME MINISTER: "Let us see exactly what it is: It is that I and my colleagues are selling our convictions."

MR. BONAR LAW: "You haven't got any."

THE PRIME MINISTER: "We are getting on with the new style."

A new style it was indeed—far removed from those elegant rapier thrusts with which Mr. Balfour had delighted the House. A new style which denoted a new rancour in English politics; a style which played on every Irish fear, which could only embitter every Irish passion.

The casual observer might suppose that the greatly intensified resistance to Mr. Asquith's Bill was the response to a pressure more extreme in character than that sponsored by Mr. Gladstone. He would be utterly mistaken. The Third Home Rule Bill conferred only a very moderate measure of self-government on Ireland, and the main question about it as an administrative measure was whether, after the numerous concessions made to Unionist sentiment, it would prove workable. The financial authority of the Dublin Parliament in particular was restricted to an extent that would deprive the new institutions of the most elementary of constitutional rights. But to the Unionists opposed to Home Rule on principle the extent of the powers to be surrendered was immaterial. Their resistance was stiffened by two quite different considerations. On the one hand the Bill made no mention of the possible exclusion of Ulster, on the other the passage of the Parliament Act in 1911 deprived the Lords of their absolute veto. Since the Unionists could no longer rely on the Upper House to block the way, the probability was that the Bill would become law within two and a half years. Such an outcome was well calculated to sharpen the edge of controversy.

The Prime Minister was fully aware that the opposition would concentrate on Ulster in the belief that without Ulster a Home Rule Parliament could not work. He had also carefully considered in the Cabinet whether Ulster or those counties

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in which the Protestants were in a clear majority should be given an option to contract out, in the Bill as introduced, or whether this should be reserved as a possible concession to be made at a later stage. Eventually the Cabinet decided that the Bill should be applied to all Ireland. This was a decision in complete accord with Mr. Asquith's own views. He had a strong personal preference that the Government policy should be a policy for the whole of Ireland. He had also a characteristic and lively sense of the possible objection to any more positive course of action. It was entirely true, as Mr. Asquith argued, that there were Nationalist minorities in considerable parts of Ulster, that in the province as a whole representation was evenly divided, that exclusion would be deeply resented by the Nationalists, that it would never propitiate extreme Unionists like Carson.<sup>1</sup> The existence of such facts complicated the problem, they did not warrant its oversight for the second time. Ignoring an issue which could not be ignored played into the hands of the Unionists. If in place of such unstatesmanlike inertia, the Prime Minister had defined a scheme of local autonomy for the Northern counties under the aegis of the central Parliament in Dublin, he would thereby have given a clear lead to his party and a clear challenge to the Unionists.

As it was, no one, least of all Mr. Asquith himself, believed that the Bill could go through without amendment. Before the measure was introduced in the House, the Cabinet warned the Nationalist party that "the Government felt themselves free to make changes, if it became clear that special treatment must be provided for the Ulster counties, and that in this case the Government will be ready to recognize the necessity either by amendment or by not pressing it [the Bill] on under the provision of the Parliament Act."<sup>2</sup> Within the Cabinet, so

<sup>1</sup> See Memorandum printed in Spender and Asquith, *Life of Lord Oxford and Asquith*, vol. II, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Cabinet Letter to the King, February 6, 1912, quoted in Spender and Asquith: op. cit., vol. II, pp. 15 seq.

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Mr. Churchill tells us, both he and Mr. Lloyd George had consistently advocated the exclusion of Ulster on the basis of county option. But "we had been met by the baffling argument that such a concession might well be made as the final means of securing a settlement, but would be fruitless till then."<sup>1</sup> Mr. Asquith's approach to Irish problems was an injudicious combination of calculation and unfounded optimism.

The Home Rule Bill was introduced on April 12, 1912. In the following year it was rejected by the Lords by a majority of 257. Despite this the Bill would automatically become law if passed in two successive sessions by the House of Commons. The prospect aroused a Unionist opposition so unrestrained as to leave the Government in doubt as to its reality. For the Liberals, reluctant in any event to use force, deluded themselves into the belief that Carson was "bluffing." Certainly not till late in 1912 did it occur to Asquith and his colleagues that the language of Bonar Law, the drilling of Volunteers and the creation of a provisional government in Ulster was the sober indication of actual intentions, and even then the Liberal Government were not fully convinced. After all, when Mr. Asquith had devoted his brilliant gifts of exposition to an analysis of the Ulster Question, Liberal policy did appear unassailable. The Prime Minister acknowledged that "minorities have their rights; they also have not only their rights but susceptibilities which ought to be considered and provided for." This the Liberal Government was prepared to do by some measure of "open" or "veiled" exclusion even though such a concession would be greatly resented by the Nationalist party. But this did not satisfy the Ulster Unionists who claimed, said the Prime Minister, a totally inadmissible right "to thwart and defeat the constitutional demands of the great majority of their fellow-countrymen."<sup>2</sup> At every election for twenty-six years four-fifths of the Irish people had voted for

<sup>1</sup> *World Crisis*, revised edition, p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> Speech in Dublin, July 14, 1912.

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representatives pledged to Home Rule. Was it reasonable to suppose that the Irish people would view with equanimity the destruction of hopes constitutionally expressed? Was it just that a Parliamentary majority at Westminster should submit "to the naked veto of an irreconcilable minority?"

Had Sir Edward Carson confined himself to the declaration, "Ulster asks to remain in the Imperial Parliament and she means to do so," his cause would have been assured of a sympathetic hearing from both the English parties. It was his avowed intention to wreck Home Rule by any means that lay in his power that caused so sharp a division of English opinion on an Irish problem. "If Ulster succeeds," said Sir Edward Carson in a moment of candour in Dublin, "Home Rule is dead."<sup>1</sup> The aim of Ulster resistance was not to secure guarantees or even exclusion for the minority; it was quite simply to make Home Rule impossible. Even when war threatened in 1914 Mr. Bonar Law contemptuously rejected any compromise that would place Ulster outside the jurisdiction of a Home Rule Parliament. In the House of Commons he said:

"The position of the Unionist Party on that question [exclusion] has never been in doubt. We have always said that we are utterly opposed to Home Rule, with or without exclusion, and that we will not in any shape or form and to no degree accept any kind of responsibility for any kind of Home Rule."

The belief that a Home Rule Parliament could not function without Ulster was the foundation of Unionist policy. Subsequent events have shown that the economic resources of the North are not, as was supposed, indispensable to self-government in the South, yet this illusion was responsible for the extreme character of Unionist resistance. For if Home Rule was impractical without Ulster, then its final defeat depended upon unflinching resistance by the Orangemen. It

<sup>1</sup> October 10, 1911. Quoted in Colvin's *Life of Carson*, vol. II, p. 104.

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was this attempt of Carson to use the Ulster Question to wreck Home Rule that prompted the Prime Minister to say that between the opponents and supporters of Home Rule there lay "a deep and hitherto unbridgeable chasm of *principle*." The issue was no longer political; it was constitutional. Ulster could claim for herself what she wished, but Ulster, as Lord Randolph's son declared, could not stand in the way of Ireland.<sup>1</sup>

Sir Edward Carson was a Southern Irishman. In his youth he had sometimes visited his uncle at Ardmayle, a lonely village in the Tipperary plains, and often he must have seen the Rock of Cashel silhouetted against the skyline with the mingled ruins of the Cathedral and the Palace of the last of the Munster Kings. But the memorials of a greater past like the discontents of the present kindled no nationalist feeling in the young Protestant lawyer. Sir Edward was fifty-six years old, a famous advocate, a member for Dublin University, when in 1910 he was chosen to succeed Mr. Walter Long as chairman of the Ulster Unionist Council. He led the Ulster Unionists in the most decisive decade of their history. Sombre, melancholy, a man of notable courage and great forensic ability, he brought to the Orange cause a considerable capacity for organization and a moral fervour almost fanatical in its intensity. It is told how on the final day of the House of Lords debate on Home Rule he was met by a young Peer in the lobby who asked him "What's the betting?" "Betting," was the cold answer, "is that all you think about when the constitution is in the melting-pot"? But it never occurred to Sir Edward to enquire how far the responsibility was his own.

Ruthless, defiant, with a thinly veiled contempt for the conventions of democratic government, Sir Edward organized resistance in Ulster. The Provisional Government in Belfast was formed in 1912. In September of the same year amid enthusiastic demonstrations the Covenant was signed. The

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Winston Churchill in *House of Commons Debates*, vol. xxxvii, col. 1720.



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responsible leaders of Church and State "Being convinced in our consciences that Home Rule would be disastrous for the well-being of Ulster as well as the whole of Ireland, subversive of civil and religious freedom . . . perilous to the unity of the Empire" pledged themselves "throughout this our time of threatened calamity to stand by one another . . . in using all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland." And the use of "all means" was in fact contemplated. Carson, before he started for Ireland in 1912, said, "he intended to break every law that is possible" and his "galloper," Mr. F. E. Smith, assured the world that he "would not shrink from the consequences of his convictions, not though the whole fabric of the commonwealth be convulsed." On the recommendation of Lord Roberts, Lieutenant-General Sir George Richardson, "who had learnt to know men and war, fighting Afghans and Pathans on the North-west frontier of India," was placed in command of the Ulster volunteer force.<sup>1</sup> In the face of such preparations was it surprising that in Ulster "the terror is so great that some men prefer to sit silent and say nothing?"<sup>2</sup> For looking back to-day the wonder is not that "Carson's bluff" was never called, but rather that its immediate consequences were not more violent.

In Ulster Carsonism was not really popular outside the ranks of the Orange Lodges, but the spectacular challenge of the new Unionism was sufficient not only to bring Liberals and Liberal-Unionists in Ulster within the Orange fold, but also to infect Conservatism in England with something of the same revolutionary virus. At Blenheim on July 27th, Mr. Bonar Law described the Liberal Government as "a Revolutionary Committee which seized by fraud upon despotic power." He continued:

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Lord Carson*, vol. ii, p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> Comment of the Rev. J. B. Armour. Quoted W. S. Armour, *Armour of Ballymoney*.

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"In our opposition to them we shall not be guided by the considerations, we shall not be restrained by the bonds, which would influence our action in any ordinary political struggle. We shall use whatever means seem most likely to be effective. . . ."

This Blenheim speech, so justly characterized by the Prime Minister as "a declaration of war against constitutional government" is dismissed by some historians as mere rhetoric designed for popular consumption and therefore unreliable as a true indication of Conservative opinion. The recent publication of the biographies of the Conservative leaders most intimately concerned reveals that such an explanation is not well founded in fact.

The policy of the Orangemen had permeated the Conservative party by introducing even to its inner counsels a spirit of intolerance, curiously out of place in the leisurely atmosphere of English politics. In the autumn of 1913 Lord Esher, for many years a confidential adviser both to the Crown and to its Ministers, one of the most influential men in England, maintained that the King should intervene. He should use the power of remonstrance. How exactly this obsolete power should be used was a matter requiring "grave consideration," but "it may be urged that the constitution is for the moment abrogated," and that "the House of Commons is, in point of fact, a Constituent Assembly of a revolutionary character and not a Parliament."<sup>1</sup> The adjective "revolutionary" was used because the Liberals had carried the Parliament Act and had introduced the Home Rule Bill.

So unwarrantable a foundation for so grave a charge, advanced by a man so shrewd in judgment, reveals most clearly how disputes over Ireland had deprived Unionist statesmen of their sense of proportion. Two days later Lord Esher expressed a somewhat modified opinion to Mr. Balfour, "Carson's methods to my thinking," he wrote, "are the right and

<sup>1</sup> *Journals and Letters of Viscount Esher*, vol. iii, p. 126.

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above board ones. Those who hate Home Rule sufficiently should be ready to risk their skins, not skulk behind the throne." And later in conversation Lord Curzon, the noble representative of an antique order, urged that the contest must finally be allowed "to solve itself in battle on the soil of Ireland." Lord Esher assented, adding that Carson should "be encouraged to provoke a contest at an early date."<sup>1</sup> The consequences of such a course in Ireland were overlooked.

The party system is essentially Whig alike in origin as in character. The Tory tendency to designate opposition to their party as "faction" expresses an outlook impressive in office but liable to mislead in opposition. Never has this been more clearly seen than in the years before the war. A policy introduced by the Government of the day, supported by a clear majority in the House of Commons, approved by the most influential political leaders in the Dominions<sup>2</sup> was designated a "base conspiracy" against the Crown and Empire and "all means" were regarded as defensible in opposing it. Bonar Law, wrote Lord Esher to Balfour, made a great mistake in admitting for a moment that the Ulster Question could be settled by a General Election, for it has always been obvious that the Ulster people would not and ought not to yield even if a General Election were to go in favour of the Government.<sup>3</sup> In such circumstances the prospect of settlement by constitutional means inevitably became more and more remote. By the beginning of 1914 the Government was prepared to concede the exclusion of the six counties. As to whether it should be "naked exclusion" as the moderate Unionists desired, or "veiled" exclusion either for a limited or indefinite period as Liberals wished, was a topic for endless negotiation. When the Buckingham Palace Conference assembled in the summer the majority of Liberals were prepared for the "clean cut."

<sup>1</sup> *Journals and Letters of Viscount Esher*, vol. III, pp. 134 and 135.

<sup>2</sup> *Vide Spender*, op. cit., p. 417.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 163.

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the less the Conference failed to reach an agreement as to the area to be excluded.

Mr. Asquith was much to blame for a failure to insist on a fair settlement. The bent of Asquith's mind, observed his biographer Lord Haldane, was towards a solution *ad hoc*, and he was inclined to optimistic views when confronted with difficulties. But if Mr. Asquith is to be criticized for inaction in the face of a dangerous situation, the Unionist leaders must to a considerable extent be held responsible for bringing about the situation about.

The predicament of the Unionist party in 1912 is clear enough. It did not consist in the lack of an Irish policy, but in the fact that its policy having been put into practice under exceptionally favourable conditions had failed. Mr. Balfour's Liberal reforms conferred undeniable benefits on Ireland, but the long Home Rule by kindness was destined to failure in a country which declined to regard good government as a substitute for national government. The Unionist therefore could not hope to maintain the Union by uncompromising opposition to the wishes of the great majority of the Irish people. It was that the Unionist policy aspired not to secure special concessions for the minority in Ulster but to use the Ulster question to block Home Rule. "Ulster," cried Carson, "will be the field on which the privileges of the whole nation will be lost or won." So it was that Ulster in a cause she considered just and loyal took every step which she had for centuries condemned in her southern neighbours. But Ulster in her own eyes was justified. For Ulster was in the right; the nationalists in the wrong.

In 1914 the faith of Irishmen in English parties and English promises was dead. The Home Rule Bill which Mr. Redmond welcomed with a warmth that cloaked anxiety as a "great measure," had never been enacted; that division of the nation which Mr. Redmond had denounced at Limerick in 1912 as an abomination and a blasphemy, was the subject of nego-

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tiation in 1913 when Mr. Redmond, under pressure from his Liberal allies, agreed to the exclusion of Ulster for six years as the "extremest limit of concession." It was a concession which the more advanced Nationalists were not prepared to make. "So long as England is strong and Ireland is weak," was the comment of Sinn Fein, "she may continue to oppress this country, but she shall not dismember it." In the south there were men who had observed the Ulster rebellion, who had learnt from the organization of the Ulster Volunteers, who had watched the *Fanny* unload her cargo of arms at Larne. Like Sir Edward Carson they did not share Mr. Redmond's belief in the wisdom and good faith of majorities at Westminster; like Bildad the Shuhite they answered and said, "how long will it be till ye make an end of words?"

### 1921. THE UNIONIST STATE

The issue in those bitter conflicts of pre-war years was clear: how to provide reasonable and proper safeguards for a minority without doing violence to the constitutionally expressed demands of the majority. It was a problem never approached in a spirit of reasonable and judicious compromise; a problem to which English statesmanship ultimately could find no solution. Those disputes over the destiny of "clusters of little parishes" in Fermanagh and Tyrone, which divided the Buckingham Palace Conference, were the symptoms of the bankruptcy of a system of government.

In 1920 the Act of Union was repealed. The Government of Ireland Act which replaced it was the misshapen offspring of Gladstone's Home Rule Bill. If no agreement on the Irish question had been possible in these years of peace, it was improbable that a just and reasonable settlement would emerge from that cauldron of conflicting passions which ended in the Anglo-Irish war.

The Act of 1920 has little claim to any complimentary

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description. It represented the *ad hoc* solution of a Coalition Cabinet, beset by many pressing tasks and its only merit was that it might shelve the Irish Question for some few years. The Act was condemned, remarked Captain Redmond some time later,<sup>1</sup> "in every corner of Ireland, and it had not even the support of a single member whether he came from the North or the South." Its most notable feature was that it sanctioned the partition of Ireland. This was the first occasion on which so dangerous a solution had been contemplated in a Home Rule Bill.

The Ulster Unionists did not receive the grant of local self-government with rejoicing at the time. The Unionist policy had been the maintenance of the Union. The provincial Home Rule offered in the Act was at the best a poor alternative. Unionists had confessedly used the Ulster question to wreck Home Rule, since without Ulster, Home Rule was believed impractical. It was not till the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 was signed that this perilous illusion was finally dispelled. Then again the Ulster Unionists, if not their leaders, felt some compunction in deserting the Southern Minority. Carson had always said that the Ulstermen were not fighting for themselves alone. Frequently had he assured the Southern Unionists that no circumstances could justify a settlement which left them at the mercy of "Rome Rule," that the Ulster volunteers would march from Belfast to Kinsale to avert such a calamity. But in the event the lot of the Southern Unionists, who had never been appreciative either of Carson's leadership or of their Orange champions, received little consideration in Belfast.

The division between Northern and Southern Unionists bears striking testimony to the intransigence of the North. Jealous at the intention of Ulster to block Home Rule, critical of the uncompromising character of Ulster's resistance before the War, the Southern Unionists ultimately came into direct conflict with the Ulster Unionists at the National Convention

<sup>1</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, 1922, vol. 151, col. 1408.

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which was confronted in 1917 with the thankless task of making a final bid for a peaceful settlement. The "inexorable opposition" of Ulster to any form of Home Rule made negotiation impossible, and though she went into the Convention with stated willingness to consider reasonable terms of settlement, she did not contribute a single concrete proposal in eight months and she ended it by voting against what Lord Midleton considered "the most advantageous and best-guarded scheme which has yet been devised to keep Ireland united."<sup>1</sup> The ultimate partition of Ireland, deeply resented by Southern Unionists, was criticized even by members of the majority in the North for the implicit desertion of the minority in the South.

That minority had been encouraged to resist Home Rule by the Orange leaders, but when the crisis came the North made terms for itself alone. In truth in the years of his leadership Carson had pursued his policy in such a way as to accentuate not only the inherited divisions between Unionist and Nationalist in every corner of Ireland, but also as to split the Unionist party in two. When Lord Carson died in 1935 the leading Southern Unionist paper wrote in its editorial "Edward Carson's career was one of the tragedies of Irish history. . . . He has died at the age of eighty-one after a life crammed with great achievements and yet strangely barren of great results."<sup>2</sup> It was a just commentary on the man who was the architect of Partition.

The Ulster Unionists were dissatisfied with the parliamentary institutions now established in Belfast, yet in intention and in fact the settlement was markedly considerate to Orange interests. The disputed areas, whose destiny divided the Buckingham Palace Conference, were all conceded to Northern Ireland. No more indeed was demanded. For in the province of Ulster as a whole the voting strength of Unionist and Nationalist was evenly divided. The spectacular gamble of

<sup>1</sup> *Ireland*, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> *The Irish Times*, October 23, 1935.

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a plebiscite was not popular with the party leaders on either side and would in fact have settled none of the real problems involved. The issue thus turned once again as it had in 1914 on the precise area to be excluded on a basis of county option. The four north-eastern counties would certainly vote for exclusion, but no such certainty existed about the wishes of Fermanagh or Tyrone. Indeed, voting as a single constituency, they have a definite nationalist majority to-day. Yet the Unionists, who could not hope to maintain a majority in Ulster as a whole, insisted that the six-county area was a cardinal point in any possible settlement. Since 1914, observed Mr. Churchill<sup>1</sup> with imperial revulsion, "every institution almost in the world was convulsed, great Empires have been overturned. The whole map of Europe has been changed. The mode and thought of men in the grouping of parties, all have encountered violent and tremendous changes in the deluge of the world, but as the deluge subsides and the waters fall we see the dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone emerging once again. The integrity of their quarrel is one of the few institutions that have been unaltered in the cataclysm which has swept the world." The Ulster Unionist Council demanded the six counties as the area of jurisdiction for the Northern Government in order that their party might govern as large an area as was consistent with assured Unionist supremacy.

The speech of Sir James Craig, the new leader of the Ulster Unionists, in the House of Commons on the question of area is of no inconsiderable historical importance. In it he said:

"We had to take a decision some days ago as to whether we should call upon the government to include the nine counties in the Bill or be satisfied with the six. . . . We admit quite frankly that we cannot hold the nine counties. Therefore we decided in the interests of the greater part of Ulster, it is better we should give up the three counties."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Aftermath*, p. 319.

<sup>2</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, 1920, vol. 127, col. 991.



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Since the area so determined was not changed, as the Irish Free State had substantial reason to hope, by the Boundary Commission of 1924, the Unionists have remained in office in Northern Ireland for nineteen years. No government in Europe, is the boast, has been so stable. So the decision of 1920 has its justification. In a province where political parties are founded on differences in creed, where a Protestant who is not a Unionist, where a Catholic who is not a Nationalist is as rare as a swallow in March, a floating vote simply does not exist. A party that has a majority retains it, for at the least threat of disaffection the old party cry is raised and every issue of political or social reform is subordinated to the chill hand of sectarian prejudice. As a result the Unionist majorities at five successive elections have remained virtually unchanged. Predominance is secure, but at the price of political vitality. The forms of democracy may remain, but its spirit can scarcely survive in a political atmosphere so frozen that some 50 to 70 per cent of the seats are normally uncontested at a general election.<sup>1</sup>

The creation of a Unionist State in North-Eastern Ireland was not welcomed by the Orangemen in 1920. On the contrary extreme reluctance was displayed in accepting self-governing institutions. The British people were reminded that Ulster had made the "supreme sacrifice" in accepting the Act. Sir James Craig (now Lord Craigavon) wrote to Mr. Lloyd George, in order "to call to your mind the sacrifices we have so recently made in agreeing to self-government and in consenting to the establishment of self-government by a Parliament in Northern Ireland. Much against our wish, but in the interest of peace we accepted this as a *final settlement* of the outstanding difficulty with which Great Britain has been confronted."

This note of rather unctuous patriotism has been main-

<sup>1</sup> Figures are given in my book *The Government of Northern Ireland*, chapter vii, on "The Electoral System."

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tained; but opinion as to the value of self-governing institutions has undergone a remarkable transformation. With the passage of time the Unionist leaders tended to place less emphasis upon the "supreme sacrifice" and more and more upon the "final settlement" that had been achieved in 1920, till to-day the preservation of these self-governing institutions has become a cardinal point in the Unionist creed. The change in opinion was caused to some extent by the administrative benefits conferred by the existence of a local Parliament, but more notably by a growing conviction that local self-government gave the most explicit guarantee possible, amid the play of changing political forces, of permanent supremacy to the Unionist party. A restoration of the Union so far as the six counties were concerned is now denounced as a heresy. "The cry 'back to Westminster,'" says the Report of the Ulster Unionist Council for 1936, "is a subtle move fraught with great danger. Had we refused to accept a Parliament for Northern Ireland and remained at Westminster, there can be but little doubt that now we would either be inside the Free State or fighting desperately against incorporation. Northern Ireland without a Parliament of her own would be a standing temptation to certain British politicians to make another bid for a final settlement with Irish Republicans." This new attitude has been endorsed by Lord Craigavon and his colleagues. The North is determined to maintain its Parliament.

The air of finality which has so completely reconciled Ulster Unionism to its destiny has proved the most repellent feature of the Settlement to the majority of Irishmen. The partition of Ireland is regarded as a crime. It may be explained; it cannot be justified. Emotional though the detestation of the Boundary may be it is not transient. The existence of this sentiment renders the treatment of the Nationalist minority, which amounts to roughly one-third of the population of Northern Ireland, a task of no inconsiderable difficulty. For the minority, whether members of the Nationalist or Repub-

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lican party, have no positive contribution to make to an "alien government" whose authority they do not recognize, whose existence they wish to terminate. Consequently, even had a conciliatory policy been inaugurated once order was restored in 1922, had tact and consideration toward the Catholic minority since been the first thought of the Government at Stormont; had Orange leaders curbed their righteous indignation at the iniquities of the "Sinn Fein Government" in Dublin, had Cabinet ministers been prepared to mar the celebrations on the Twelfth by refraining from indiscreet and provocative oratory, the nationalist parties one may be sure—though no evidence is available to substantiate the assumption—would not have become reconciled to a divided Ireland.

If the Act of 1920 was greeted with distaste in the North, it was hailed with uneasy derision in the South. Even those prepared to judge the legislation of a British Government on its merits, detected the validity of objections to the proposal for local self-government in Belfast. It is true that before the war the Nationalists ultimately assented under Liberal pressure to the exclusion of the North Eastern counties from the jurisdiction of the Dublin Parliament. It was their hope that the concession of local autonomy to this area, or of Home Rule within Home Rule as it was popularly called, would suffice to pacify the Unionists and so secure the *inclusion* of these counties in principle in an all-Ireland Parliament. Far different was the effect of the Act of 1920, for by setting up a Parliament in Belfast it has given strength and permanence to Partition. This settlement, which appealed to Mr. Lloyd George as a convenient way of disposing of an embarrassing difficulty, was viewed quite differently on the other side of the Irish sea where a people suspicious by temperament, and rendered still more suspicious by experience, interpreted it as a deliberate blow at Irish unity. Such was not the Prime Minister's intention, yet had it been so he could have delivered no more effective blow to further his aims.

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As early as May 30, 1920, Mr. C. P. Scott of the *Manchester Guardian* analysed his objections to the Bill in a letter to Mr. Dillon.

"As you say," he wrote, "the present Bill has no relation to the needs of the situation. Its real objects, so far as I can make out, are, first to get rid of the Home Rule Act, and secondly to entrench the six counties against Nationalist Ireland. Its effect, one fears, will not be to make a solution easier, but to make it harder by creating a fresh and powerful obstacle."<sup>1</sup> These were prophetic words. It is the existence of a parliament in Northern Ireland that threatens to make 'practical and irrevocable' the division of Ireland. Had the six counties remained part of the United Kingdom, as Scott desired, then sooner or later the practical inconvenience of separation would have brought about an agreement freely negotiated with the Irish Parliament.

Beautifully situated, on a hillside some miles from the centre of Belfast, stand the new Parliament Buildings at Stormont. As one looks from the foot of the hill at the long imposing façade, whose effect is somewhat spoiled in winter when leafless trees expose to view the incongruous architecture of the Speaker's official residence beside, one may readily understand why so much money was lavished in building so magnificent a home for the Northern Parliament. For Stormont is the offspring of no wanton extravagance, but rather is it the symbol of the permanence and stability of the Northern State. It is the visible indication of the Unionist intention to perpetuate the makeshift solution of the Ulster Question enacted in 1920.

A life-size statue of Lord Carson dominates the approach to the Parliament Buildings. No more fitting tribute could be paid to the leader whose policy resulted in the constitution of the Belfast Parliament and whose political outlook still dominates Ulster Unionists. Unreal, over-dramatized, irresponsible as the utterances of the Unionist party on Ulster

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in J. L. Hammond, *Life of C. P. Scott*, p. 273.

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before the war may appear to-day, the spirit that prompted them still rules in Belfast. Conservatism in England is once again a creed essentially moderate in policy as in expression. The extravagance of a Blenheim speech is once more alien to its outlook. But in Ulster victory has lain with the extreme Right. It is the Unionism of the Volunteers, the Unionism of the Covenant that has survived. The Government, in its detestation of compromise, in the almost religious fervour of its Unionism, in its thinly veiled contempt for the niceties of constitutional government is the unmistakable heir to Carson's creed. Operating in an uneconomic unit confronted with an irreconcilable opposition, the Northern Government had an unenviable task to fulfil. That self-government has not brought much happiness to the people of Northern Ireland is a misfortune for which it cannot be held wholly responsible, but its share of responsibility is greater even than that of irreconcilable republican extremists simply because security in office has given it great opportunities for attempting to bridge the gulf between Irishmen of different creed and culture.

The truth is that the Unionist State is founded upon negations. Though Lord Craigavon may repeat with undiminishing conviction the well-worn phrases, may continue to speak of any *rapprochement* with Dublin as "preposterous and absurd," though the folly of fanatical republican bombers in England may leave him "tertius gaudens" at a moment when the security of his government was less than at any time in its existence,<sup>1</sup> yet the reiteration of rigid negatives cannot indefinitely provide a substitute for positive achievement. For the present so astute a party leader as the Prime Minister knows well how to force the judgment of electors into the service of their prejudices. Yet to do this the Government is tempted to discourage its extremist supporters only to the extent that respectability demands. In the House of Commons the Prime

<sup>1</sup> In 1937-9 when the growth of an Independent Unionist Party threatened the solidarity of the Unionist vote.

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Minister has not hesitated to say that he is more proud to be a President of the Orange Order than to be the head of the Government, even though the name Orangeman is associated with the more extreme manifestations of sectarian strife.<sup>1</sup> "The very name of Orangeman," said Archbishop Whately, the last of all men to be a friend of the Roman Catholic Church, "is a sign chosen on purpose to keep up the memory of a civil war which every friend of humanity would wish to bury in oblivion. It is doing what among the heathen was reckoned an accursed thing—keeping a trophy in repair." Yet the history of Ulster has perhaps made it inevitable that a Unionist Government should be at times forgetful of the fact that Unionist is the adjective and government the noun.

In the long run, however, tactics, no matter how astute, are likely to prove a barren substitute for imaginative statesmanship. In the spring of 1938 the inauguration of a new constitution, the resumption of friendly intercourse between Ireland and the United Kingdom offered an opportunity that perhaps may not soon recur for a timely and generous oblivion of the differences that have divided Irishmen in the past. Mr. de Valera chose the moment to launch a campaign for unity, a campaign based on the assumption that the British Government was wholly responsible for Partition and could end it when it chose. This historical half-truth was useful perhaps in that it shelved inconvenient responsibility for Partition from both the Nationalists and Orangemen on to the broader shoulders of the British Government, but it had in it a sufficient element of truth to encourage the most dangerous reactions amongst extreme republicans. The Government campaign for unity was followed by the I.R.A. "declaration of war" on the British Government. Lord Craigavon responded to the favourable situation with a snap election. An experienced politician, with a wide knowledge of men and things, he sensed the moment with unfailing skill. Raising the old

Vide his speech, N. I., *House of Commons Debates*, vol. xxi, col. 1091.

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slogans "not an inch," "no surrender," Lord Craigavón not only found the Nationalist ranks divided but also caught the independent Unionists unprepared. His political judgment was justified—but history may well record the verdict that he snatched at the shadow and missed the substance. He had his triumph; but it was a triumph that may prove as bright and as brief as the rainbow's arc.

PART III

*The Character of the Irish Revolt*





## *The Economic Background to Sinn Féin*

THE economic interpretation of history—how seductive the phrase and its implications proved to the post-war generation. Possessing in equal measure the attraction of novelty and of simplicity it was applied indiscriminately to the most varied phenomena. It was the charm that exposed to view that hard core of reality that lay submerged under the shifting sands of historical circumstance; and unique pleasure was afforded to the initiates of this sombre creed by the sight of their elders lost for ever in the labyrinthine maze of the superficial. There was something almost deserving of pity in the spectacle of men who wasted long hours in examining the evidence, in weighing the relative significance of political, religious, or economic motive forces in the search for historical truth, because that truth had long since in fact been plainly revealed. There was no need to weigh imponderables, for was it not revealed in the pages of *Das Kapital* that all history was but the manifestation of a fundamental economic struggle whose outcome was the predestined triumph of the proletariat?

When applied to Ireland the economic interpretation of history is suggestive, but it is not satisfying to any except the elect. It must be admitted at once that far too little attention has been paid to the economic forces in Irish history even by the most distinguished of Irish historians. The economic background has been neglected only a little less than the institu-

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tional background.<sup>1</sup> It is rare to find any detailed discussion of social and economic forces in any period; it is impossible to discover any critical account of the political institutions, of their structure, their influence or their achievement, in Irish historical studies. These indeed are serious lacunae and contribute materially to a perverted presentation of Irish history. So much must be admitted, but to acknowledge neglect is not equivalent to saying that what has been neglected is alone fundamental. Irish concentration on the *politics* of Anglo-Irish relations has been carried to excess, but the economic interpretation now so popular among left-wing intellectuals in England affords, not a substitute, as its disciples contend, but rather an approach which illuminates much of what has hitherto been obscure.

### THE NATIONALIST PARTY IN DECLINE

In the last three chapters we have looked at the successive developments in Anglo-Irish relations from Westminster because there was only one authority which could reform the government of Ireland and that was the Parliament of the United Kingdom. In the nineteenth century, agitation in Ireland was a commonplace, rebellion was always smouldering beneath the surface, but the failure of Smith O'Brien in '48 and of the Fenians in '67 made it all too clear that no rising could seriously endanger English rule. The goal of Irish endeavour was consequently restricted to a reform of the Land system, eventually enacted in response to violent pressure from below, and reform of the Union to be extracted by a pressure in Parliament which was exerted effectively by challenging the conventions and the spirit of constitutional government.

<sup>1</sup> Professor Curtis's *History of Ireland*, for example, which is accepted as a standard work is a political history of the nineteenth century type and devotes virtually no consideration to the influence either of institutions or of economic factors on the course of events.

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But while the Wyndham Act of 1903 saw the fulfilment of the former aim the fall of Parnell convinced Irishmen that the campaign for constitutional reform had failed at any rate for many years to come. The result was a shift of interest from Westminster to Ireland, from the source of constitutional reform, to the breeding-ground of rebellion. To see in right perspective the influence of economic forces in the Ireland of the early twentieth century, it is necessary to recall for a moment the course of Irish politics after the failure of the Gladstonian Home Rule Bills.

Parnell was a Protestant landlord whose capacity for leadership was so outstanding, whose devotion to the cause of Irish independence was so bitterly sincere that for over a decade he was in fact as well as in name the "uncrowned king." The obedience he exacted from his supporters, his unwavering concentration on the end to be achieved gave to the Irish people a new confidence and a new hope. Parnell's intellect was not profound, but it was incisive and since the problem with which he was confronted was in essentials simple, the directness of his approach was a notable asset. So long as he remained to lead the Nationalist party Irishmen had reasonable hope that Home Rule would sooner or later pass from the region of debate to that of solid fact. For this reason the Irish members at Westminster were honoured as men who were fighting in the vanguard of the national movement. The authority of the Nationalist party was fatally undermined only when Home Rule appeared unattainable to the more extreme nationalists, while it still continued to embody all the hopes of the Parliamentary party.

Gladstone once observed that men ought not to suffer from disenchantment since they ought to know that ideals in politics are never realized. The Irish were not willing and perhaps not capable of surveying their disappointments with such philosophic detachment. The fall of Parnell marked the beginning of a period of profound disillusion in Ireland, a period in

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which is to be noted little of obvious interest or activity in the political field and which was yet a period of a significant development in national consciousness.

For ten years after the "Parnell split" the ever-powerful fissiparous tendencies of Irish politics reasserted themselves. National life was devitalized by faction, the Nationalist party divided. Parnell's opponents were led by John Dillon, Tim Healy and William O'Brien; the remnant who remained faithful to him after the divorce proceedings had called forth a denunciation of the leadership from the Roman Catholic hierarchy, after a tribute to him by his supporters had been condemned by a Papal Rescript, was led by John and William Redmond. Slowly this remnant acquired prestige, but it was not till 1900 that the party was reunited under the leadership of John Redmond.

John Redmond, like Parnell, was a member of a landowning family, but unlike Parnell he was a Roman Catholic. He was a graduate of Trinity College, yet none the less was a strong nationalist in his youth. From Parnell he inherited both a rather uncritical attitude to a Home Rule settlement of the Irish Question and a firm belief in the efficacy of Parliamentary tactics. In his younger days Redmond's criticism of the Union was as pronounced as Parnell's. "For us," he said,

the Act of Union has no binding moral or legal force. We regard it as our fathers regarded it before us, as a great criminal act of usurpation carried by violence and fraud, and we say that no lapse of time and no mitigation of its details can ever make it binding upon our honour or our conscience.

And as late as 1907 Redmond declared in Dublin, "the methods of resistance" to be adopted remained merely a "question of expediency," an appeal to arms would be "absolutely justifiable" if it were possible.<sup>1</sup>

When Asquith formed his government and still more when

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Gwynn, *Life of John Redmond*, p. 77 seq.

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the Liberal victory at the 1910 elections made Home Rule once more a question of practical politics, Redmond's tone became far more conciliatory. Ireland, he said, wanted Home Rule, which he defined as self-government for Ireland in purely Irish affairs, subject to the supreme authority of the Imperial Parliament. This very moderate demand did not, as Redmond was well aware, secure the support of all Irish nationalists, but he believed the dissenting separatists to be of slight significance both in number and ability. In that he was mistaken.

Home Rule in the twentieth century was in essentials a sound and prudent policy. The report of the Childers Commission in 1896<sup>1</sup> which showed that Ireland, far from gaining financially from the Union, had in fact been consistently over-taxed, provided a sound material argument for the control of Irish administration and taxation by an Irish Government. Sir Horace Plunkett's admirable endeavour to revive agriculture in Ireland through the co-operative system, emphasized by implication the material benefits that would be derived from the intelligent encouragement which could be given to Irish industry and agriculture by a local legislature and administration which alone would possess the necessary time and knowledge to give it. But prudence and material advantage were not the qualities that appealed to the younger generation. Encouraged in their romanticism by the poetry of Yeats and his circle, dreaming of the regeneration of Gaelic Ireland with Douglas Hyde, the young men marked out as their goal not the pedestrian Home Rule haven of the Nationalist party but the independent Ireland of the Fenians. Parliamentary tactics seemed to them not as they once seemed to Redmond, a commonsense means of attaining that goal by Fabian methods,

<sup>1</sup> Financial Relations Commission Report and its Evidence, London and Dublin, 1896. A summary of its conclusions will be found in Paul Dubois, *Contemporary Ireland* (Dublin, 1908), p. 335 seq. and in Hammond, *op. cit.*, pp. 691-2.

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but rather a dishonourable indulgence in dangerous compromise.

The failure of the Fenian Rising in 1867 did not finally discourage those who believed that an independent republic was the true aim of Irish nationalism and who believed that this aim was so revolutionary in character that it could be achieved only by violence. In 1873 the Irish Republican Brotherhood was reorganized in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Its strength even at the end of the century was small and a member of its Supreme Council has reckoned that at that time "its whole membership could have been comprised in a concert hall."<sup>2</sup> The oath of membership was

In the presence of God I . . . do solemnly swear that I will do my utmost to establish the National Independence of Ireland, that I will bear true allegiance to the Supreme Council of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and all my superior officers, and preserve inviolable the secrets of the organization. So help me God!<sup>3</sup>

The Brotherhood always had its selected group ready to act as "The Provisional Government of the Irish Republic" when the moment for revolution should come. As a secret society it was condemned by the Roman Catholic Church, but its activity behind the scenes was continuous. Thomas Clarke, who was associated as a young man with the Fenian Rising, devoted himself to the revival of the Republican Brotherhood after his release from fifteen years' imprisonment in 1898, took part in the 1916 Rising and was executed with the other leaders. He afforded a personal link between two generations of Irish republicans whose outlook was different but whose aims were identical.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Miss D. Macardle, *The Irish Republic*, chapters ii and iv.

<sup>2</sup> P. S. O'Hegarty, *The Victory of Sinn Féin*.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Miss Macardle, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

<sup>4</sup> A biography has been written by Louis N. le Roux.

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The work of the Irish Republican Brotherhood was abetted and financed from the United States by the Clan na Gael.<sup>1</sup> Sinn Fein, which was founded by Arthur Griffith was more dependent on support at home. Griffith first published his paper the *United Irishman* in 1897, though Sinn Fein was not founded as a party till 1906. His policy was as uncompromising as that of the Republican Brotherhood, but he did not share its belief in the efficacy of physical force. Redmond's Parliamentary policy was condemned as "useless, degrading and demoralizing." In 1910 Griffith prophesied in the columns of the *United Irishman*:

Ireland has maintained a representation of 103 men in the English Parliament for 108 years. The 103 Irishmen are faced with 567 foreigners. . . .

Ten years from now the majority of Irishmen will marvel they once believed that the proper battleground for Ireland was one chosen and filled by Ireland's enemies.

The Sinn Fein policy, unlike that of the Nationalist party was separatist, and unlike that of the Republican Brotherhood it was monarchical. Griffith's admiration for Hungarian nationalism induced a belief in a Dual Monarchy as the ideal solution of Anglo-Irish relations. But the Nationalist party and Sinn Fein never co-operated. Griffith's programme did at first receive the sympathetic support of the I.R.B.

The differences which divided the Nationalist party and the Republican separatists has been attributed to differences in class and even in racial origins. It is true that the Nationalist party was essentially a bourgeois party, but it is also true, that both Griffith and the majority of the republican leaders who were executed in 1916 sprang from the same class. It is true that Redmond and his party became infected during their long sojourn at Westminster with something of the English spirit of compromise, but that was due entirely to the influence

<sup>1</sup> Miss Macardle, op. cit., p. 64.



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of environment. There is no racial ground for distinguishing between the Nationalist "West Britons" and the separatist Gaelic Irish. On the contrary it is remarkable how many of the most uncompromising of the separatist leaders were not Gaelic but Anglo-Irish in origin. The father of Patrick and Willie Pearse was English. Sir Roger Casement was the son of Ulster Protestants, the Countess Markievicz was the daughter of an Anglo-Irish landlord, Maud Gonne's mother was English, Erskine Childers was the son of an English father and an Irish mother, whilst de Valera is the son of a Spanish father and an Irish mother. In truth the difference between the rival parties was temperamental. It was in this respect the difference between the Feuillants and the Jacobins in the French Revolution, the difference between those who believed in the expediency of Burke and those who gave uncompromising allegiance to the ideology of a theoretic conception. In Ireland this division, which finally resulted in civil war, was obscured during the first decade of the century. Miss Macardle writes of Irish affairs,<sup>1</sup> "the reign of Edward VII covered a decade very deceptive to the superficial observer." This observation is just and it makes it the more necessary to supplement our political knowledge of the period by a consideration of the economic forces at work in order to bring the essential character of this critical interregnum in Irish history into clearer relief.

### THE CONFLICT OF ECONOMIC INTERESTS

In the early years of this century the economics of the Irish Question were manifested in two distinct fields, on the one hand in the struggles for ownership of the land, on the other in the capitalist-labour conflicts in the large cities which culminated in strikes and lock-outs in Dublin and Belfast in the years just before the World War. As in each case the object

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 61.

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was different, so, too, the method and even the principles which dominated the struggle were different. The peasantry, devoutly Catholic, had nothing but hostility for the Socialist programme of universal application, which proved so effective a rallying force in the large cities. James Connolly, the Labour Leader, a man of passionate sincerity who was executed in 1916, directed his appeal to the poor of the large cities, to the "men of no property." He echoed the words of Wolfe Tone: "Our freedom must be won at all hazards. If the men of property will not help us they must fall; we will free ourselves by the aid of that large and respectable class of the community—the men of no property." This appeal to organized labour, whose inspiration is to be found in the French revolutionary thought as interpreted by Tone rather than in Marx, aroused more misgivings than sympathy in rural Ireland. The small peasant proprietor was not a man of "no property"—after the Wyndham Act, he was, or else was well on the way to becoming, a freehold farmer—a man of property. And like the peasants of France who guarded so tenaciously the lands they had won from the privileged class, from the nobles and from the clergy in the Revolution, so too the Irish farmer viewed with extreme suspicion appeals of a Socialist or even a vaguely Utopian character which might ultimately deprive him of the ownership of his land. Thus the interests of organized labour in the towns were not then, just as they are not to-day, the same as those of the agricultural classes.

The union in 1916 of the working-class leaders with their internationalist background and of the rural classes, who were intensely nationalist in outlook, was one of the most remarkable and the most decisive of the turning-points in modern Irish history. As yet it is too early to say whether this fusion, brought about by the pressure of contemporary events, possesses any degree of permanence. On the whole the evidence suggests that it has not. The ideals of labour have made no headway in rural Ireland since 1916. Labour candidates outside

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the large cities have little chance of success, though proportional representation sometimes enables the party to capture one seat in seven in some of the large county constituencies like Tipperary. But since the first Dáil, Labour representation has consistently declined owing partly to tactical blunders, but even more to a growing mistrust of its internationalist background. This mistrust has in fact little foundation, for the Labour party in Ireland, under the necessity of conformity to the dominant Church, is careful to dissociate itself from the more advanced working class movements, whether Socialist or Communist, in other parts of the world.<sup>1</sup> But none the less a strong undercurrent of hostility remains, and tends to become more marked with the passage of time. So long as the rural constituencies divide their representation between two parties whose programme emphasizes political rather than economic ideals, so long, too, will labour remain a small minority party, for these constituencies decide the government of Ireland.

### THE INFLUENCE OF THE LAND QUESTION

During the nineteenth century the violence of land agitation bore no direct relation to the degree of distress in rural Ireland. On the contrary, as the material condition of the tenant farmers improved, so the agitation against the land system became more intense. The Famine was not followed by general revolt. It was followed by emigration and passive despair as Smith O'Brien soon learned in '48. The beneficial reforms incorporated in the Land Acts of 1880 and 1881, though counteracted in some measure by the slump in agricultural prices experienced in the following decade, were in any event the natural precursors to more aggressive action by the Land League. The removal of injustices, the increased security of tenure rendered all the more irksome the restrictions that sur-

<sup>1</sup> The deletion of a "Workers' Republic" in 1940 from the declared aims of the Labour party was due largely to the representations of the Church.

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vived. De Tocqueville reminds us that on the eve of the Revolution the peasantry in the country around Paris where the land system was the most enlightened and the feudal dues the least onerous in the whole of France, were the most active revolutionaries, whilst the peasants in the country of the Loire and in Brittany where the *ancien régime* survived almost intact, fought a civil war against the revolution. Such apparent inconsistency is to be encountered not once but many times in history. The most dangerous moment for a bad government, said de Tocqueville, is normally that at which it begins to reform. Only a great statesman can save a government which decides to lighten the burden on its people after they have endured long years of oppression.<sup>1</sup> These words might well have been written of the last phase of English rule in Ireland, alike of its political and its economic aspect. In relation to the land, it is sufficient to observe that the Land League was founded after and not before the first reforming land legislation had been enacted, and that the appeal of Davitt was directed essentially, not to a prostrate, but to a resurgent class. If that had not been so the "fall of Feudalism" in Ireland might well have been long delayed.

The land question is supremely important in nineteenth-century Irish history because it was in Marx's words "the exclusive form of the social question in Ireland." When the cry in England was for shorter working hours, for improved conditions of work in factories and mines, for schemes of state insurance and for the rights of trade unions, Irish agitation was concentrated almost entirely on the alleviation of the lot, not of the industrial, but of the agricultural classes. The difference, which accounts in some measure for the tardy action of the British Government and excuses in like measure the unsuitability of many of its well-intentioned reforms, fixed a wide gulf between the interests of the English and Irish working classes and so ultimately the predominance of the land in Ireland served to reaffirm national divisions.

<sup>1</sup> *L'Ancien Régime*, livre III, chapter iv.

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Lord Dufferin in a letter to *The Times*, which has acquired a spurious immortality from the contemptuous sarcasm which it evoked in the pages of *Das Kapital*, once explained by picturesque simile how the problem of the land acquired such great intensity. "Debarred from every other trade and industry," he wrote, "the entire nation flung itself back upon the land, with as fatal an impulse as when a river whose current is suddenly checked rolls back and drowns the valley which it once fertilized." A glance at the trends in Irish population shows most clearly the disastrous reactions to this invasion of the land. In 1800 the population of Ireland was about 5,000,000, by 1841 it had risen to 8,175,000, by 1851 it had decreased to 6,623,985, by 1866 it had shrunk to some 5½ millions. That a non-industrial Ireland could support a population of eight millions in reasonable comfort, even with vastly improved methods of agricultural production and distribution, appears most unlikely. With a population of little more than half that size, subdivision of land to-day has been carried to excess, inasmuch as many of the new farms are too small to allow of subsistence farming.<sup>1</sup>

The decline in population after the Famine might lead one to anticipate an alleviation of the lot of those remaining on the land. To some extent this was certainly the case. Between 1851 and 1861 the number of holdings between 15 and 30 acres in size increased by 61,000, the number of holdings over 30 acres increased by 109,000, while the total number of farms decreased by 120,000. The number of holdings under 15 acres had therefore materially diminished. But the benefits that might have accrued to the survivors were sensibly lessened by two things: on the one hand the depopulation of the country threw much of the land out of cultivation so that the agricultural output declined, whilst on the other hand the centralization of farms made possible by the disappearance of the smaller

<sup>1</sup> The leasing of subdivided "ranches" by the new occupiers is quite frequent in some parts of the country.

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farms encouraged the extension of cattle-rearing thereby facilitating the decline of agriculture and lessening the demand for labour. The consequence was that the major advantages were secured by the large farmers and landowners who benefited from the sale of the "surplus product" until the slump in livestock prices, and were not distributed evenly throughout the population. Because of this revolution in agriculture, which is to be attributed to an economic trend rather than to the grasping character of the landlords, the reproduction of relative over-population more than kept pace with absolute depopulation. The process, which was described by Marx<sup>1</sup> as one which might serve the orthodox economists supremely well for the support of their dogma, that poverty is the outcome of absolute over-population and that equilibrium can be re-established by depopulation, was obviously no solution on economic quite apart from humanitarian grounds. So much was admitted by implication in Lord Dufferin's correspondence to *The Times*,<sup>2</sup> in which he maintained that Ireland was still over-populated and that increased emigration would afford the proper outlet for her surplus population. Such an outlet has been used either in the form of colonial expansion, or of emigration to the New World by nearly all European nations, and if used in the *Irish* interest in a moderate and orderly degree the process might well have proved beneficial. But there was no guarantee at the time that further depopulation would not result once more in less intensive cultivation followed in turn by relative over-population.

"What condescension in so great a lord!" commented Marx derisively on Lord Dufferin's interest in the Irish problems; but the day was soon coming when the attention of the English governing classes was riveted on Ireland. For the land question there were two possible solutions, dual-ownership or a peasant ownership. The former was adopted in principle in the Land Act of 1881, the latter was the solution finally accepted in

<sup>1</sup> See *Das Kapital*, chapter xxiv, part vii.

<sup>2</sup> In 1866-7.

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the Wyndham Act of 1903. It is ironic that the Act of 1881 was sponsored by a Liberal Government, for had it been enacted some years earlier it might well have afforded a foundation for a hierarchical system of land tenure in which the rights of the tenants would have been safeguarded, the obligations of the landlords rendered inescapable. So at least Sir Horace Plunkett believed, and he observed not without regret that the Magna Carta of the Irish peasant, famous as the three F's—fixity of tenure, free sale, fair rent—was a concession that was made too late. Had it been granted in time, even if the act had been launched at the eleventh hour on a rising market, the principle of dual ownership might have proved acceptable and finally led in Plunkett's words "to a strengthening of the economic position and character of the Irish tenantry" in such a way as "would have enabled them to meet any condition which might arise."<sup>1</sup> In the event, however, the dual-ownership established in 1881, proved no more than a stepping-stone to the principle of single ownership—peasant proprietorship—which was accepted in 1903. Gladstone, having found the land system intolerable for one party, made it intolerable for the other as well and so paved the way for a land system quite out of accord with that which he had planned.<sup>2</sup> The transition was undoubtedly hastened by the consistent pressure of the Land League—a pressure that was not always pleasing to Parnell. "He spoke of anarchy," complained Davitt the founder of the Land League in 1882, "as if he were a British Minister bringing in a coercion Bill." At the same time Parnell wanted the Ladies' Land League suppressed. "They have kept the ball rolling," said Davitt; "I don't want them to keep the ball rolling any longer," snapped Parnell. "The League must be suppressed or I will leave public life." The difference of opinion was representative of the wider difference in outlook between the conservative

<sup>1</sup> *Ireland in the New Century*, pp. 22-4.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Plunkett, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

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Nationalists who followed Parnell and Social Democrats who looked for as revolutionary a change in the social as in the political system.

The land question found a permanent solution in the Wyndham Act of 1903. The Conservatives who sponsored the Bill regarded it as part of the wider policy of appeasement known under the name of killing Home Rule by kindness. The Act had the support of all parties on the ground of expediency. The Ministers calculated that a nation of peasant proprietors would become progressively conservative in outlook, and historical justification for this belief was afforded by weighty arguments derived from Sir Henry Maine's study of Ancient Law, whose influence was then very great. In one respect their predictions were not unfounded. Ireland, like France to-day, a nation of peasant proprietors, has remained fundamentally conservative in social policy, and like France, too, it has remained strongly nationalist in sentiment. That is where Balfour miscalculated. He believed that a solution of Ireland's great economic problem would undo the nationalist movement. He believed, that is to say, like Marx, that the economic problem alone was fundamental. It was not. The political claims of Ireland possessed a vitality quite independent of any economic issue, and in fact the solution of the land focused attention on the national question. The removal of the social grievance assisted the union of remarkably divergent forces on the national claim to independence.

A true perspective of the relative significance of economic and political issues may be found by considering the position of the Conservative Government, intent on its policy of killing Home Rule by kindness. Gladstone had justified Home Rule by claiming that Irish nationalism was not a passing mood but an inextinguishable passion. The Conservatives believed that a judicious combination of coercion and concession would sap its vitality. In pursuit of their policy they introduced material reforms whose effect was undoubtedly beneficial. The



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reforms were enacted under conditions most favourable to their practical application. Twenty years of absolute government was Salisbury's panacea in 1886. The condition was granted. During the next twenty years his party was in office for seventeen, and the brief Liberal interlude, thanks to the House of Lords, left its Irish policy intact. Salisbury himself was Prime Minister for thirteen years, he was succeeded by his nephew for the remaining four. For almost the whole time during which Salisbury was Prime Minister, one or other of his nephews was Chief Secretary. The policy therefore was applied continuously and consistently by the men who had advocated it. Parliamentary criticism was powerless to move the solid Unionist majority, and in any event since Chamberlain and Hartington had crossed the floor, the balance of debating ability lay heavily on the Unionist side.<sup>1</sup> The Nationalist ranks were divided by internecine strife. To complete the good fortune which attended this experiment, there was the co-operative movement in Ireland founded by Sir Horace Plunkett with the purpose of reviving Irish agriculture and effecting material regeneration from within. All the omens were favourable, yet the experiment was a miserable failure. In 1905, the year in which the Unionist Government fell, the Sinn Féin movement was founded. Truly did de Tocqueville say that the most dangerous moment for an oppressive government is that at which it begins to reform.

The facts make it clear that the land question, though associated with national sentiment, was not its motive force. It had, however, a great significance of its own. "I agree," said Sir Horace Plunkett, "with most Englishmen in thinking, though for a different reason, that the passing of the Land Act marked a new era in Ireland. They regard it as productive of the dawn of the practical in Ireland. I antedate that event—and regard the Land Act rather as starting a new era because it removes the great obstacle which obscured the dawn of the

<sup>1</sup> Vide, Hammond, *op. cit.*, pp. 730-1.

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practical for so many, and hindered it for all.”<sup>1</sup> Sir Horace was right as to its material, but he misjudged its political consequences. John Eglinton once remarked of Sir Horace with more wit than truth, “that his indifference to politics bewrayed him for a Unionist, his indifference to religion bewrayed him for a Protestant.”<sup>2</sup> The indifference to politics was certainly responsible for Plunkett’s miscalculation of the consequences of this climax to land agitation. It acted as a stimulus, not as a check, to national aspirations. Davitt had understood the tremendous potentialities of organized pressure against an unpopular system and the example of the Land League was not to be neglected in the political field. The Land League found the farmers weak and divided; it made them an effective force for political ends. Consequently the chief legacy of the land question was not a peasantry reconciled to “good” government, but a peasantry who, conscious of their new economic status as owners of land, had been brought once for all into the national struggle. It was a decisive development in the social as in the political history of Ireland. The solution of the Land Question heralded the emergence of a rural middle class whose control over the Nationalist movement has been challenged frequently but never successfully, a class whose social and political philosophy is embodied in the constitution of 1938.

In the early years of Queen Victoria’s reign the French traveller de Beaumont had spoken of the “vindictive cruelty,” of the “savage violence” of the Irish peasant in his acts of revenge. For some seventy years from the time when he first visited Ireland, outrage and reprisal disturbed the peace of the countryside. The tradition was established, men became accustomed to brutal scenes, and, as those who have read the opening scene of the *Playboy of the Western World* will recall, revenge even on helpless animals might in certain circumstances be referred to with pride. The passions of rural Ireland lingered on after the wounds which had excited them had been

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., pp. 13-14.

<sup>2</sup> *Irish Literary Portraits.*

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healed, and they permeated the more humane outlook of the towns,<sup>1</sup> so that a tradition of cruelty and violence was a significant legacy of the land struggle to the political conflict that was to be.

### LABOUR AND SINN FEIN

A chance phrase at times makes one fully aware of that change in outlook towards social questions which, in the last half century, has been even more remarkable than the change in material conditions. That "we are all socialists nowadays" is perhaps true, but it is not very enlightening and it conveys no idea of the underlying change in temper and opinion. But to read Bagehot's *English Constitution*, published first in 1867, is to gaze at the picture of another world. That so penetrating a critic should describe the English people as essentially "a deferential people," that he should regard this characteristic as an outstanding political virtue in itself gives his study that antiquarian flavour which makes the book so attractive to the older Universities. "A nation of respectful poor is," he writes, "far happier than a nation in which there are no poor to be respectful." It is delightful indeed, but so alien to the twentieth century mind that one wonders if it was ever representative of the English outlook. Certainly that outlook had disappeared more completely from the Irish than from the English scene by the end of the first decade of the present century, owing to the social disintegration resulting from the land war. In Ireland the change in social relations was more marked in the country than in the towns. In Dublin the Vice-regal court and the administration at Dublin Castle preserved up to the eve of the war the appearance and the forms of a dying social order. But in the country, peasant proprietorship by freeing the tenants from all obligation to the landlord clearly con-

<sup>1</sup> This was inevitable for in a predominantly agricultural country the majority of townsmen are only at one remove from the land.

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stituted the death warrant of an *ancien régime*. For this reason the trend of social development in Ireland is in marked contrast to that in contemporary England, where the aristocracy preserved its authority in the country for decades after its collapse in the towns.

The bitter conflicts in England over the social reforms of the Asquith government found a counterpart in labour revolt in Ireland. There the settlement of the land question was the prelude to a class struggle which threatened at one moment to divide and indeed to bring into direct hostility the working class and the rapidly expanding middle class; the Labour movement and Sinn Féin, the men who were primarily socialists as Connolly and those who were nationalists as Redmond and Griffith.

The possibility of a sharp cleavage between Irish working-class and Irish nationalist forces secured the attention of Lenin, who was concerned to explain that Marx could not possibly have been mistaken in his interpretation of the Irish Question whatever the superficial appearances might suggest. Though opposed to federalism in principle, Marx had agreed to a federal solution of the Irish Question, provided the liberation of Ireland could be brought about, not by a reform act, but in a revolutionary way as a result of the mass movement of the Irish people supported by the English working-class. Such in the view of Lenin was undoubtedly the ideal solution of Anglo-Irish relations. But things turned out rather differently. This was not because the Marxist premises were mistaken, argued Lenin, but "because both the Irish people and the British proletariat proved to be weak." "Only now by means of miserable compromises between the English Liberals and the Irish bourgeoisie," he continued, "is the Irish Question of land reform (with compensation) and autonomy (as yet not introduced) being solved." Because of the "sinister opportunism" of Irish nationalists and of English working-classes Lenin wrote somewhat pessimistically of the prospects of

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revolution in Ireland in 1913. Here is his picture of the country.

"Ireland is something like a British Poland only rather more of the Galician type than the Warsaw-Lodz-Dombrowsky. National oppression and Catholic reaction have transformed the proletarians of this unhappy country into paupers and the peasants into toil-worn, ignorant and dull slaves of priest-craft, they have transformed the *bourgeoisie* into phalanxes of capitalists and despots over the workers masked by nationalist phrases, and finally they have transformed the administrators into agents accustomed to every kind of violence.

"At the present moment the Irish Nationalists (i.e. the Irish *bourgeoisie*) are the victors: they are buying out their land from the English landlords; they are receiving national *home rule* (the notorious home rule for which the long and stubborn struggle has been waged between Ireland and England), they will govern "their" land in conjunction with "their" Irish priests.

And this nationalist Irish *bourgeoisie* is celebrating its "national victory," its "state" maturity by declaring a war of life and death against the Irish labour movement."<sup>1</sup>

This commentary, most of which is based on a distorted interpretation of the facts, derives its interest from two particulars. Earlier commentators on Irish politics, including Marx and Engels, commented without exception on the absence of a middle class. Lenin, on the contrary, aware of the rapid growth of that class makes them the villains of the piece, "the phalanx of capitalists" who use national aspirations as a cloak for sinister designs of working-class oppression. And Lenin accepts apparently without misgivings the view that Irish Nationalists were *deliberately* engaged in such duplicity. This view is frankly absurd. But there was a sharp division, though not a "war of life and death" in the years 1909 to 1914 between National and Labour leaders which deserves some more precise analysis. It is a supremely important historical fact.

<sup>1</sup> *Collected Works*, vol. xvi.

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Labour discontent in the Irish cities before the war was not the expression of an abstract revolutionary feeling, but the outcome of very real grievances. Wages were low, especially for unskilled labour which was unorganized almost up to the outbreak of the war. Housing conditions in Belfast and even more in Dublin were amongst the worst in Europe. According to the Report of a Departmental Committee published in 1914, nearly a third of the entire population of the city of Dublin were living in single rooms. The death-rate among children was exceptionally high. According to the Medical Press<sup>1</sup> the death-rate in Dublin in 1911 was 27·6 per 1,000 which was higher than that of any other city in Europe, the next highest being Moscow with a rate of 26·3. Sir Charles Cameron, Medical Officer of Health in 1905, reckoned child mortality among the professional classes at 0·9, for the children of labourers 27·7. It was a remarkable contrast, since the unskilled workers, whose children alone came into the second category, comprised almost a quarter of the total adult male population of the city. In brief, the condition of the working classes cried aloud for reform. The issue between Labour and Sinn Fein leaders was the principle by which the admitted need for reform should be effected. Should attention be concentrated on the economic aspect of the problem or should that be regarded as dependent on the wider issue of national freedom and therefore subordinate to it? Larkin and Connolly maintained that the former was the fundamental issue, Griffith and Sinn Fein leaders that material conditions were necessarily of secondary importance.

The division between Labour on the one hand and both the Sinn Fein and the Parliamentary Nationalist party on the other tended to become more acute according as Labour policy became more active in the years before the war. The question that divided them was a question of principle. The 1905 programme for Sinn Fein drafted under the inspiration

<sup>1</sup> Figures quoted in R. M. Fox's *Green Banners*.

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of Griffith advocated a moderate social policy akin in many respects to the Radical-Liberal programme enacted in England between 1909-1914 and to the contemporary Radical-Socialist reforms in France. But their essential character, even though the nationalization of certain services was contemplated, was not socialist. On the contrary they were the social reforms of a man most profoundly influenced by the political conception of nationalism and who was determined to make his economic and social programme subservient to his political aims. He advocated the economic nationalism of Friedrich List, not because he was impressed by its abstract validity, but because it suggested an economic system most suited to his national programme. Griffith's ambition, a critic maintained, was to make Ireland a "Gaelic Manchester." The phrase was only a half-truth, for Griffith, though he was not an ideological republican, was none the less first and foremost a nationalist. And his appeal evoked the strongest support from the middle-classes, though it is always well to remember that Sinn Fein, founded in 1905, reached its pre-war high-water mark in 1908, after that declining to such an extent that its historian has said,<sup>1</sup> "From 1910 to 1913 the Sinn Fein movement was practically moribund."

James Connolly was to the Labour movement what Arthur Griffith was to Sinn Fein. His most notable achievement was that in 1916 he succeeded in effecting a junction between revolutionary Labour and revolutionary National forces as represented respectively by the Citizen Army and the Irish Volunteers. Before the war the possibility of such fusion appeared extremely remote. Connolly had always emphasized strongly the national side to the Labour programme, more strongly indeed than could be sympathized with by many Trade Unionists, and yet, despite this, the division between him and the various nationalist organizations was very great. "Only the Irish working-class," said Connolly, "remain as the

<sup>1</sup> R. M. Henry, *The Evolution of Sinn Fein*, p. 88.

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incorruptible inheritors of the fight for freedom in Ireland." The implications of such a statement could never be accepted by the nationalist organizations, largely dependent for support on the agricultural community. And in 1898 in the opening number of the *Workers' Republic* Connolly declared, "We are Republicans because we are Socialists." While Connolly was never a rigid doctrinaire yet the dependence of national on socialist aims was repugnant to the majority of Irishmen whose outlook accorded ill with the conception of a fundamental economic struggle essentially international in character.

In 1913 the issue became clear. The strike of the dock labourers in Belfast in June 1907 was the herald of a militant-revolutionary movement in Irish Labour, which was not an isolated event, but had its counterpart in most European countries and in the U.S.A. in the years before the war. The Belfast strike was organized by James Larkin, a man of crude but fiery eloquence and picturesque appearance, whose ability to sow the wind was as undoubted as his inability to control the whirlwind. The strike was remarkable in that it effected a momentary union between the workers of different creeds in Belfast, despite the designs of the employers to foment sectarian strife. On July 12, 1907, Belfast witnessed the unusual sight of a great demonstration waving both Orange and Green banners march down to the Custom House to listen to Larkin's crusade for Labour unity, "Not as Catholics or as Protestants, as Nationalists or as Unionists, but as Belfast men and workers stand together and don't be misled by the employers' game of dividing Catholics and Protestants."

Such was the theme of Larkin's campaign; but after a transient success sectarian passions reasserted their traditional division. For this reason the strike did not foreshadow a transformation of political life in the North, but it did portend a period of intense strike activity all over Ireland. The technique of the sympathetic strike was exploited probably to



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excess, even if the interest of the unskilled workers alone be considered, while the skilled workers showed marked resentment at Larkin's harsh advocacy of industrial strife.<sup>1</sup>

The return of Connolly to Ireland in 1910 brought a man of less eloquence, but of far superior organizing ability, to assist in guiding the Irish Labour Movement. Connolly's ideal for Ireland was a Worker's Republic. In England in the early years of the century he had associated himself with the revolutionary as distinct from the Fabian wing of the Socialist movement, and in the U.S.A. he was closely associated with international socialism, notably with the I.W.W. (Industrial Workers of the World) which was founded at a convention in Chicago in 1905. He had gained a big victory for Ireland in the Labour World in 1900, when delegates of his party were given credentials as representing a separate nation at the Paris Internationalist Socialist Congress.<sup>2</sup> This international background to Connolly's thought and activity did not appeal to non-Socialist Nationalists among whom must be numbered the vast majority of the Irish people. Griffith almost immediately denounced the strike policy of Larkin and Connolly. In 1908 he wrote a series of articles in *Sinn Féin* attacking Connolly as the "strike organizer." He denounced the activity of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union founded in 1909 as "English Trade Unionism," and he was outspoken in his disapproval of strikes unauthorized by the executives of the Unions to which the men were affiliated, even though this involved the sanction of an English executive for an Irish strike.<sup>3</sup>

The climax to industrial strife came in 1913. The rival leaders were James Larkin standing on the one side, and William Martin Murphy, leader of the Employers Federation, who possessed a controlling interest in the Press and in the Tramway Company, on the other. The history of the conflict does not concern us here. It was waged with great, but by no means

<sup>1</sup> R. M. Fox, op. cit., p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

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exceptional bitterness and was chiefly remarkable for relentless tenacity on both sides. AE, who was a normally independent observer, declared with unusual heat:

We no longer know people by the old signs and the old names. People are to us either human or sub-human, they are either on the side of those who are fighting for human conditions in labour or they are with those who are trying to degrade it and thrust it into the abyss. . . .

In the event the victory lay with the employers after a conflict of eight months, but it was not final, for the Irish Transport Union was not crushed. What were the consequences? A new belief in the efficacy of violence and even more important a *rapprochement* between revolutionary Labour and revolutionary Nationalism.

Lenin surveyed the struggle from Geneva. "A new spirit," he felt in 1913, had awakened in the country, for the unskilled workers had introduced "unparalleled animation into the Trade Unions." The outcome was hailed with rejoicing. "The Dublin events," wrote Lenin, "mark a turning-point in the history of the labour movement and of socialism in Ireland. Murphy threatened to destroy the Irish Labour Unions. He only succeeded in destroying the last remnants of the influence of the Nationalist Irish *bourgeoisie* over the proletariat in Ireland. He has helped to harden an independent, revolutionary labour movement in Ireland, free from Nationalist prejudices."

Lenin was quite mistaken. After 1913 Irish Labour tended to become, not less, but more nationalist in outlook. This was due in part to the growing absorption of Connolly in the Nationalist movement, an absorption which provoked the witticism that while Irish Nationalism had gained an advocate, Irish Labour had lost a leader, but it was due still more to the greater significance attached to the political as distinct from the economic struggle by the working classes themselves. The outbreak of the world war undoubtedly hastened this shift in

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opinion and the traditional feeling that England's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity distracted attention from social to political issues.

The sequel is well-known. In Easter Week, 1916, the citizen army, conceived at first purely as a strikers' defence force, came out to fight in the national struggle. Connolly declared his policy in an article in the *Workers' Republic* in April 8th of that eventful year.

The cause of Labour is the cause of Ireland, the cause of Ireland is the cause of Labour. They cannot be dissevered. Labour seeks that an Ireland free should be the sole mistress of her destinies, supreme owner of all things within and upon her soil. Labour seeks to make the free Irish Nation the guardian of the interests of the people of Ireland and to secure that end would vest in that Free Irish Nation property rights as against the claims of the individual. . . . Is it not well that we of the Working Class should fight for the freedom of the Irish nation from foreign rule as the first requisite for the free development of the national power needed for our class?

Under Connolly's leadership the Irish working class brought a distinct and clearly-defined force into the national struggle. In prison Connolly, thinking of the association between Labour and Nationalist movements remarked, "The Socialists will not understand why I am here. They forget that I am an Irishman." It was quite true. Though the execution of Connolly, a wounded man unable to walk, produced an immense revulsion of opinion in his favour, yet in August 1916 the Trade Union Congress at Sligo declined to identify itself with Connolly's participation in the Easter Rising. Thomas Johnson, a moderate socialist and later a much respected leader of the Labour party in the Dail, then declared as Chairman of the National Executive that "as a Trade Union Movement we are of varied minds on matters of history and political development and consequently this is not a place to enter into a discussion of the right or the wrong, the folly and the wisdom of the revolt."

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That attitude still represents the attitude of Irish Labour whatever personal opinions individual Trade Unionists hold. After the Treaty, unlike Fianna Fail, the Labour deputies took their seats in the Dáil and for many years gave support to Mr. Cosgrave's constitutional programme.

### EPILOGUE

The course of Labour's policy in Ireland should not be viewed in isolation, for its programme, its reaction to the pressure of outside events may be paralleled in the history of the Labour movement in other countries. The technique of the sympathetic strike was adopted from experience of its effectiveness in the New World, whilst the climax of the capitalist-labour in Dublin in 1913 found a counterpart in the great Chicago strike and in the French railway and industrial strikes of 1909 and 1911.<sup>1</sup> The conflict assumed a rather more irresponsible form in Ireland than in France or in the United States, largely because Ireland was not a self-governing country. Where the Socialist Briand ended the French strikes by mobilizing the strikers, no such action was possible where the chief protagonists were men who held no official rank. In Ireland the State did not intervene to impose its own solution. But despite such differences the motive force in both cases was similar and it is interesting to observe that the response to external pressure was similar too. The German menace tended progressively to diminish the international and to strengthen the distinctively national character of socialism in France. Consequently the extension of the period of military service just before the war was generally accepted despite the violent opposition which the proposal encountered from Socialists and Pacifists under Jaurès's leadership. The reaction of the working classes in Ireland to external pressure, different

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the account of the strike during M. Briand's ministry in *Bourgeois, France*, vol. II, p. 377 seq.

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in character but the same in principle, followed similar lines. After the great strikes, Labour under Connolly's leadership became more national in outlook and though never completely identified with the national movement none the less contributed to its success.

After the war the history of Labour in Ireland and in other countries is contrasted in as much as in Ireland it could never hope to secure a majority in a predominantly agricultural country. Indeed, the steady decline in Labour representation in the successive Dála since 1922 is to be attributed largely to a widespread mistrust of its programme amongst the rural community. In part this has been due to indifferent leadership and to a failure to appeal directly to the peasant farmers as the Socialist and even the Communist parties have appealed in France to the farmers of the North-West and to the vine growers of Burgundy and of Provence, but more fundamentally is it due to the Irishman's distaste for the rigidity of a Socialist system and to the mistrust of a people profoundly provincial in outlook for the international character of the Socialist creed. Lenin was quite mistaken in thinking the strikers of 1913 heralded the overthrow of the *bourgeoisie* and the triumph of the proletariat in Ireland. On the contrary, it foreshadowed the partial absorption of Labour into the national movement thereby confirming what the history of the land question had clearly suggested, namely, that in Ireland the economic motive force was subordinate to the political throughout the last phase of the Union.

CHAPTER VIII

*The Influence of the Romantic Ideal in  
Irish Politics*

“Was it for this the wild geese spread  
The grey wing upon every tide;  
For this that all that blood was shed,  
For this Edward Fitzgerald died,  
And Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone,  
All that delirium of the brave?  
Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone,  
It’s with O’Leary in the grave.”

W. B. YEATS

THE ode in which Yeats wrote contemptuously of the complacent prosperity of Ireland of the Edwardian age reflected the growing discontent of the intellectuals whose names are most intimately associated with the Celtic Renaissance. John Eglinton in his critical, if all too brief, study of Yeats and his circle speculates whether the scornful refrain:

Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone,  
It’s with O’Leary in the grave.<sup>1</sup>

was not the spark which fell upon the inflammable minds of the young Gaelic enthusiasts and kindled their vague aspirations into a realistic purpose.<sup>2</sup> Such speculation, which reflects the high political significance attributed by members of a literary circle to the utterances of one another, need not be taken too seriously, but it is true both that Ireland began to

<sup>1</sup> September 1913.

<sup>2</sup> *Irish Literary Portraits*, p. 33.

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be romantic once again in Yeats' sense just before the war, and that the stimulus of an intellectual revival proved a direct precursor to revolution.

National sentiment in Ireland had always found a romantic outlet. The unhappiness of the present was counteracted by legends of a golden age long ago or by dreams of the happiness that would be assured once national independence were regained. Such romantic illusions afforded a natural escape, and an antidote to despair. It is quite wrong to suppose that it was a new influence that came into Irish life in the early years of this century; on the contrary the romanticism was very old, only its form of expression was new.

The need for the de-Davisization of Irish history, as it was somewhat inelegantly described, was consciously felt by Irish historians of some thirty years ago. Romantic perverted tales of the Sack of Baltimore, or of the Spanish expedition to the coast of Kerry were little to the taste of a more realist generation. Thomas Davis was blamed, but quite unjustly. Romanticism in history as in politics was the product of an "escapist" philosophy. A low standard of life, the horrors of famine, the failure of revolt, all that depressed Irish life, that inflamed a seemingly hopeless discontent against English rule, found some compensation for the ills of the present by a romantic interpretation of the past and an eschatological view of the future. To this outlook Thomas Davis, Clarence Mangan, Standish O'Grady and Sir Samuel Ferguson gave expression, but they were not responsible for it. Indeed, one need only recall the influence of Davis on Arthur Griffith, that most practical of patriots, to realize that though romanticism coloured his political creed it remained an influence and not a guide. Independence, said Davis, was the goal of the national movement; but the achievement of this ideal was not an end in itself, but the all-important means for the building up of a new and happier country. For this reason Davis, like Tone before him, cared little for political abstractions. Would that

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many of his critics had possessed so well-balanced an outlook.

In 1893 the Gaelic League was founded. Its first President was Douglas Hyde, later to be the first President of Eire. The declared purpose of the League was the revival of the Irish language, a revival which had the same political significance as the revival of Magyar, Czech, Serb and Croat earlier in the century. Hyde though following a well-worn nationalist path was none the less resolute in his determination that the League's activities should be confined to its purely linguistic purpose. It was to remain "non-political and non-sectarian." In fact, however, the revival of Gaelic inevitably constituted a powerful incentive to separatist feeling. "It is our Gaelic past," said Hyde, "which, though the Irish race does not recognize it, is really at the bottom of the Irish heart and prevents us becoming citizens of the Empire." Sir Horace Plunkett, though a Unionist, shared Hyde's rather curious underestimate of the influence of the language revival. In his book<sup>1</sup> Plunkett wrote—and it is valuable contemporary evidence—"Of this language movement I am myself but an outside observer, having been forced to devote nearly all my time and energies to a variety of attempts which aim at doing in the industrial sphere much of the same work as that which the Gaelic Movement attempts in the intellectual sphere—the rehabilitation of Ireland from within." Nothing, complained Plunkett, would induce his Unionist friends to believe that the language movement was not in the political sense, separatist. The sequel has shown that their doubts were in fact well-founded. From the Unionist point of view there was solid political objection to the revival of Irish, for it threatened to stimulate a consciousness of nationality in precisely the same way as the revival of Magyar earlier in the century, and of the Czech, Polish and Croat later on, stimulated the ambitions of the nationalists within the Hapsburg Empire. Yet the issue was, perhaps deliberately, confused and we find Dr. Mahaffy, later Provost of Trinity

<sup>1</sup> *Ireland in the New Century*, 1904, p. 149 seq.



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College, informing the University Commission of 1900 that it was impossible to find a text in Irish that was not "either religious, silly or indecent." Such ill-considered denunciations did the Unionist cause the doubtful service of avoiding the implicit political challenge.

In retrospect Plunkett, and in some degree, Hyde himself, were clearly mistaken in their view of the non-political character of the Gaelic League. It is not necessary to have a definite political programme in order to influence political thought and political action. Moreover, the conception of a national language had a strong romantic appeal to a generation wearied of the sordid political quarrels that followed the fall of Parnell. Patrick Pearse, leader of the Easter Rising of 1916, pronounced a verdict far removed from that of Plunkett. "The Gaelic League," he wrote, "will be recognized in history as the most revolutionary influence that has ever come into Irish history."<sup>1</sup> An overstatement? Perhaps. It is still too early to assess the enduring significance of the Gaelic League. But fundamentally it is a verdict whose truth cannot be denied.

The spirit of the Irish Literary Revival as a whole was at once more romantic and less Irish than that of the Gaelic League. To-day, indeed, a rather exclusive nationalism denies the title even of Anglo-Irish to the more notable figures of the Literary Revival. Mr. Corkery who draws rather fine distinctions on the meaning of "Anglo-Irish" maintains that Anglo-Irish literature is mostly the product of Irishmen who neither live at home nor write for their own people. This literature may be a homogeneous thing but Irishmen cannot think of it as indigenous. While he allows that the work of Yeats and his colleagues at the Abbey Theatre was *in intention* genuine Anglo-Irish literature, he is disposed to regard it in fact as "no more than an exotic branch of English literature." Such a verdict, which is perhaps in part the product of a somewhat introspective phase in Irish nationalist thought, has

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Macardle, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-3.

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some element of truth but should not be accepted as the whole truth.<sup>1</sup>

The influence of the Literary Movement on Irish politics was indirect. Yeats, Synge, Moore and Joyce, though influenced in a greater or lesser degree by the early Ireland of history and of legend did not appeal directly to "political" Ireland. "All great literatures," writes John Eglinton, "have seemed in retrospect to have risen like emanations from the life of a whole people which has shared in a general exaltation: and this was not the case with Ireland. How could a literary movement be in any sense national when the interest of the whole nation lay in extirpating the conditions which produced it?"<sup>2</sup> In logic such criticism is irrefutable; in fact this late flowering of Anglo-Irish letters was, despite bitter controversies, essentially national both in inspiration and in effect. That its political influence was impulsive rather than decisive is due chiefly to the extreme romantic outlook of its leaders which deprived the movement of a more serious political character. Few more extreme expressions of the Romantic ideal have found utterance than that in Yeats's verses:

God save me from those thoughts men think  
In the mind alone,  
He that sings a lasting song,  
Thinks in a marrow bone.

I pray—for fashion's word is out  
And prayer comes round again—  
That I may seem, though I die old,  
A foolish, passionate man.

So Romantic even in his old age remained the leader of the Irish literary revival and one who has good claim to be regarded as the greatest of all Irish poets. The reaction against

<sup>1</sup> See D. Corkery, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature*, pp. 1-27, for a very suggestive discovery of Anglo-Irish literature.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 5.

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intellectual analysis goes far when it comes to thinking with the marrow;<sup>1</sup> and while one may agree with Yeats in allowing that it is worse to have too little passion, as the modern intellectual poets, than too much, yet one must also allow that this self-conscious reversion to the unconscious renders coherent guidance in a political movement well-nigh impossible. While it is unfair to ask of a poet any but an aesthetic standard yet the historian must none the less observe that the edifying, the moral, function of literature was so completely neglected by Yeats and his circle as to deprive the Irish Literary revival of the more serious character which otherwise it might so easily have acquired.

The absence of an undertone of moral seriousness in Yeats's work consorted ill with his political outlook, for he believed as ardently as any Whig of the Glorious Revolution in the leadership of an aristocracy. Often he expressed his admiration of the "tall unpopular men," of the women who were beautiful in the proud old way,<sup>2</sup> and surely then he was thinking all the time of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy of the late eighteenth century. "I am proud," he said in the Senate during the Cosgrave régime, "to consider myself a typical man of the minority. We are the people of Burke; we are the people of Grattan; we are the people of Swift, the people of Parnell. We have created most of the modern literature of this country. We have created the best of its political intelligence."

Among the Ministry of the Free State, Kevin O'Higgins commanded his admiration—

<sup>1</sup> Cf. and contrast George Moore's comment on Yeats. "Yeats can no longer think with his body, it is only his mind that thinks. He is all intellect, if that isn't too cardinal a word." *Hail and Farewell*, vol. 1: *Ave*, p. 216.

<sup>2</sup> Dr Gogarty's lines:

"Tall unpopular men,  
Slim proud women who move  
As women walked in the islands when  
Temples were built to Love,  
I sing to you."

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A great man in his pride  
Confronting murderous men.

because, as Mr. J. M. Hone<sup>1</sup> has so justly observed, O'Higgins seemed to come nearest to the realistic and authoritarian tradition of Irish leadership. Yet despite this admiration for the qualities of leadership, such leadership was the one thing that the Irish Literary Movement did not give to Ireland.

The comparative lack of moral seriousness in the work of Yeats and his contemporaries is worth emphasizing because in Ireland to-day there is a tendency to underrate the "national" character of the Literary Revival. It is true of course that the leaders of the Irish Literary Movement were for the most part Anglo-Irish in origin, but their failure to appeal more directly to the "Irish" Ireland was less because of difference in origin, to which after all a wildly exaggerated significance is at present attached, than to the romantic, and in some degree unreal view of Irish nationality. Yeats in his search for some national ideal, which he could associate with his romantic belief in Ireland, inevitably found his audience not amongst politicians but amongst the mystics. His detachment indeed was not a fault but a sign of the aloofness and a tribute to the unimpeachable integrity of a great poet.

He never sang a poorer song  
That he might have a heavier purse,  
Nor gave loud service to a cause  
That he might have a host of friends.

But in the end Yeats's romantic conception of Irish nationality left him in mind and in sympathy divorced from the makers of the new Ireland. His ideal of an aristocratic intellectual liberal state was indeed repellent to and repelled by the new conception of a Gaelic-Catholic country with its Puritan outlook and its Censorship Act. But that difference in outlook should not obscure Yeats's own contribution to the making

<sup>1</sup> In the *London Mercury*, March 1939.

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of the New Ireland. It was indirect, as has been said, because the Irish Literary Movement neglected the edifying function of literature, but it was none the less decisive in character. The Ireland of the "Celtic Twilight" which in following the *Wanderings of Oisín* thought again of the Fenian

heroes lying slain

On Gabhra's raven-covered plain;

and learned of how Cúchulain met his death, which was brought

to the cairn heaped grassy hill

Where passionate Maeve is stony still.

could not but grow restive under rule which though becoming increasingly benevolent was yet branded as alien. The last question and answer in *Cathleen Ní Houlihan*, "Did you see an old woman going down the path?" "I did not, but I saw a young girl and she had the walk of a queen," gave romantic expression to the Irish Nationalist ideal in a form whose emotional appeal to Irishmen was intense.

Yeats's vision was imprecise, but that very imprecision was what made it so stirring an inspiration, for it filled the minds of the more intellectual of his countrymen with dreams and clothed in glamour his country's past. Douglas Hyde, the founder of the Gaelic League, has been honoured as first President of Éire; but his achievement was more dependent for success, than many Irishmen now care to admit, on the poetic inspiration of Yeats and on his foundation of the Abbey Theatre. Had Yeats's poetry been more didactic this truth would have been acknowledged. But as he himself has written:

Yet when all is said

It was the dream itself enchanted me:

Character isolated by a deed

To engross the present and dominate memory.

Players and painted stage took all my love,

And not those things that they were emblems of.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Last Poems*, "The Circus Animals' Desertion."

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And who of all who have enjoyed his poetry could wish that it had been otherwise?

Yeats's influence on Irish history tends to be discounted also on the ground that so many of his famous associates in the Literary Revival either then or subsequently became very critical of the course of the National Movement. Those who survived into the post-Union age had little sympathy with the new Ireland which (in some cases unconsciously) they had helped to bring into being. Many of them, unlike Yeats, preferred to live out their days in exile, thereby depriving the new state of an intellectual stimulus it could ill afford to lose. But it were idle to pretend that Moore and Joyce, to take two notable examples, could have found in Ireland a congenial home, whatever the predominant intellectual attitude of the new state. Indeed, even in pre-war years there had been some degree either in aloofness or of artificiality in these writers' conception of Ireland as it was and Ireland as it should be. Lady Gregory's self-conscious attempts to bring herself "nearer to Ireland" largely defeated their own end, whilst in the association of George Moore and Yeats there are times when a similar desire provokes amusement rather than sympathy. If George Moore is to be believed,<sup>1</sup> Yeats and Moore contemplating the composition of an heroic drama—Diarmuid and Grania—in collaboration seriously considered the wisdom of writing the play in French, translating it into English and then into Irish in order to suit the dialogue to the theme. Such stories may be solely the product of Moore's malicious wit; but Moore's collaboration in the Literary Movement, temporary though it proved, was at one time assuredly genuine, and in itself bears testimony to the predominance of the literary over the national background.

George Moore, though strongly attracted by the country of his birth, never idealized it, as those who have read his *Trilogy* on Irish life will remember.

<sup>1</sup> *Hail and Farewell*, vol. 1: *Ave* (Ebury edition), p. 268 seq.

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The Irish do not know themselves but go on vainly sacrificing all personal achievement, humiliating themselves before Ireland as if the country were a God. . . . And these sacrifices continue generation after generation. Something in the land itself inspires them. And I begin to tremble lest the terrible Cathleen ni Houlihan might overtake me. She had come out of that arid plain, out of the mist, to tempt me, to soothe me into forgetfulness that it is the plain duty of every Irishman to dissociate himself from all memories of Ireland—Ireland being a fatal disease, fatal to Englishmen and doubly fatal to Irishmen.<sup>1</sup>

Such an approach to Ireland was indeed far removed from that of the single-minded patriots who were determined that at whatever cost Ireland should regain her freedom, but it is remarkable that a man of such an outlook should be so attracted to Ireland. Scornfully in the *Confessions of a Young Man* he condemns the ignominy of the modern world which is enfeebled by its weak acceptance of humanitarian scruples. "That some wretched farmers and miners," he wrote, "should refuse to suffer that I may not be deprived of my *demi-tasse* at Tortoni's, that I may be forced to leave this beautiful retreat, my cat and my python—monstrous! And these wretched creatures will find moral support in England—they will find pity. Pity, that most vile of all virtues has never been known to me."

Even in jest such language could not but appear in bad taste to the self-conscious political Ireland of his day. Moore, in his early aesthetic Parisian phase, was not the same man who came to Ireland many years later, but he was still a dilettante in all things save the art of letters. The political significance of his association with the Literary Movement is negligible, but it is suggestive. Moore's one dominating interest was writing. He came to Ireland because he was impressed by the vitality of the Literary Movement. He did not regard

<sup>1</sup> *Hail and Farewell*, vol. 1: *Ave* (Ebury edition), pp. 220-1.

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its political influence seriously because it was vague, romantic, idealistic. Yeats, who maintained that the softness, the weakness, the effeminacy of modern literature should be attributed to ideas, was assuredly not one to impress on his disciples the need to consider the probable influence of letters on practical affairs. Moore, though he possessed the Irishman's characteristic interest in personalities, had no serious interest in politics and he illustrates in extreme form, and indeed deliberately caricatures, the political irresponsibility of this literary movement.

At Coole, says John Eglinton,<sup>1</sup> Yeats's defects as a leader became evident. He lived completely in an Ireland of his imagination, and without the least perception of the real trend of events. This verdict is too pronounced. But it is true that the romantic idealist conception of Ireland, which has found immortal expression in Yeats's poems, involved a marked degree of detachment from political realities. Even AE, the secretary of the Agricultural Co-operative Society, the indefatigable cyclist who journeyed all over Ireland in the service of Plunkett's prosaic ideals, the member of the Literary Movement whose contact with practical affairs, whose interest in the material regeneration of Ireland was close and continuous, none the less at times made only too clear his detachment from the political outlook and the political sentiments of his contemporaries. One example will suffice. In 1921, at the height of the Anglo-Irish war, AE was writing about ideal politics in a futurist symposium. His theme was "What relation have the politics of time to the politics of eternity?" or alternatively, "Why does the Earth spirit inspire its children in so many contrary directions?" And on the conclusion of the Treaty he published the pamphlet, whose intention was to give some kind of lead to Irish opinion, but in fact only "revealed the remoteness of his idealism from the actualities of politics."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., pp. 8-9.

<sup>2</sup> Vide John Eglinton's *Memoir of AE*, pp. 140-2 (London, 1937).



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In it the arguments on both sides are set out, but a verdict on their merits is left to the transcendental wisdom of the National Being.

The consequences of such detachment, admirable in so many respects, are seen in AE's belief that Ulster would form a part of the new Ireland. An Ulsterman himself, he claimed to know Ulster well, and yet he never appears to have contemplated the secession of the Northern counties. If such ignorance of public opinion was possible in AE, whose pronouncements on Irish affairs were always inspiring and at times exceedingly shrewd, then one may conceive the remoteness of other members of the Literary Movement who had few or no practical interests.

Arthur Griffith, who is reputed to have had little use for poets, whom he was inclined to consider a trifle mad, reflected thereby the reaction of the mundane Irishman to the remote national idealism of the Celtic Renaissance. One remembers how when Michael Collins was on the run with a price upon his head he came at considerable risk one evening to meet AE in Dr. Gogarty's house. AE poured forth in his rich golden voice a mystic monologue, "which was all music and half poetry." "Your point Mr. Russell?" inquired Collins sharply. This interruption was symbolic of the two worlds which had met but did not understand each other.<sup>1</sup> The Sinn Féin leaders, the members of the I.R.A., looked on politics with different eyes to the writers who in no small degree had inspired them with a national feeling which was at once militant, idealist, and ruthless.

The nationalism of the Celtic Renaissance was militant. The later reactions of the poets to the horrors of the revolution, to the tragedy of civil war at times lead outside observers to believe that their outlook was tinged with pacifism. This was not so. Lionel Johnson gave expression to the ideal of a final sacrifice for the nation which inspired the men of 1916.

<sup>1</sup> Vide Dr. Gogarty's *As I was walking down Sackville Street*, p. 174.

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Ere peace come to Inisfail  
Some swords at least some fields must reap  
Some burning glory fire the Gael.

Yeats in one of his last poems wrote:

You that Mitchel's prayer have heard,  
"Send war in our time O Lord!"  
Know that when all words are said  
And a man is fighting mad,  
Something drops from eyes long blind . . .<sup>1</sup>

And it is always to be remembered that while the Easter Rising did not take the form and was not inspired by the motives which stirred the hearts of these Anglo-Irish poets, yet they paid noble tribute to the men who died. AE wrote:<sup>2</sup>

Their dream had left me numb and cold,  
But yet my spirit rose in pride,  
Refashioning in burnished gold  
The images of those who died,  
Or were shut in the penal cell.  
Here's to you, Pearse, your dream not mine  
But yet the thought for this you fell  
Has turned life's waters into wine.

And Yeats in lines already famous:<sup>3</sup>

I write it out in a verse—  
MacDonagh and MacBride  
And Connolly and Pearse,  
Now and in time to be,  
Wherever green is worn,  
Are changed, changed utterly:  
A terrible beauty is born.

There was no protest because appeal had been made to the final arbitrament of force.

Remote from practical politics the poets of the Celtic

<sup>1</sup> *Last Poems*, "Ben Balben."

<sup>2</sup> Quoted John Eglinton, *Memoir of AE*, p. 119

<sup>3</sup> *Easter*, 1916.

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Renaissance most certainly were, yet their influence on them was decisive. Romanticism in poetry need not necessarily mean detachment from practical affairs. Was not Chateaubriand the Foreign Minister of the Restored Monarchy, was not Lamartine a Minister of the short-lived Second Republic? But in Ireland, a country which was not self-governing, the romantic national idealism of the Anglo-Irish poets coincided in sentiment, but not in final purpose with the political nationalism of the vast majority of the people. This distinction in outlook was due not to differences in racial origin, but to the neglect of the edifying function of literature by those poets who abandoned all control over the movement they had in part inspired. That it should be so is no criticism of them as men, still less as poets, but it is an historical fact of no little importance.

Looking back over the past, Yeats had the misgivings of a sensitive man with regard to the influence of his poetry.

All that I have said and done,  
Now that I am old and ill,  
Turns into a question till  
I lie awake night after night  
And never get the answers right.  
Did that play of mine send out  
Certain men the English shot?  
Did words of mine put too great strain  
On that woman's reeling brain?  
Could any spoken words have checked  
That whereby a house lay wrecked?  
And all seems evil until I  
Sleepless would lie down and die.

Men noted that Lamartine's hair had turned grey in the Revolution of 1848; and Yeats's influence in Ireland, though less striking, was more lasting than that of Lamartine in France.

Both Yeats and AE were national poets whose memory

<sup>1</sup> *Last Poems*, "The Man and the Echo."

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Ireland one hopes will always delight to honour. Yeats looked back on Irish history:

Cast your mind on other days  
That we in coming days may be  
Still the indomitable Irishry.<sup>1</sup>

AE looked forward to the Ireland of the future.

We hold the Ireland in the heart  
More than the land our eyes have seen  
And love the goal for which we start  
More than the tale of what has been. . . .  
We would no Irish sign efface,  
But yet our lips would gladlier hail  
The first-born of the Coming Race  
Than the last splendour of the Gael.  
No blazoned banner we unfold—  
One charge alone we give to youth,  
Against the sceptred myth to hold  
The golden heresy of truth.<sup>2</sup>

It was a not ignoble ideal, but it is not the ideal of modern Ireland. It has unfurled its "blazoned banner" and the inscription on it is "A Gaelic Catholic State."

In 1921 the romance of Irish independence was over, its history had begun. Save only in the secession of the Northern counties the whole series of politico-romantic ideals which had inspired so many generations of Irishmen had been fulfilled. Ireland at last possessed liberty and independence, if not unity, but the fulfilment of such long-cherished hopes left behind it a feeling of hollowness and disillusion among the people. The seemingly hopeless character of the struggle made even the wisest regard the achievement of independence as an end and not as a beginning. What was to follow the achievement had always been contemplated through rosy mists of optimism. The "Golden Age" of Irish history would somehow

<sup>1</sup> *Last Poems*, "Ben Balben."

<sup>2</sup> *Collected Poems*.

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miraculously return in the free light of independence, the bitter wrangles of politicians would be replaced by a generous renunciation of individual ideals in order to unite for a common purpose. Culture and learning would be revered in the new Ireland as they had been honoured in the Ireland of long ago. But in fact the "harvesting of the dream" shattered many illusions, and Irishmen felt as Italians had felt after 1870, that an heroic age was over, that prose had succeeded to poetry.<sup>1</sup>

The disillusion in Ireland was probably more intense than in Italy. The struggle for independence had been won, but the war of 1919-21 had loosed bitter and revengeful passions; the very character of the struggle, ambushes and reprisals, terrorism and destruction hardened men's minds to cruelty and to lawlessness. The traditions which bound society were loosened, the principles of ordered government trampled underfoot. That independence could have been won by any peaceful means is extremely improbable, but there is no denying the reactions to the methods employed; reactions which found a tragic outlet in the civil war whose memories still embitter public life in Ireland. Less happy than the Swiss who had won their freedom in medieval times, who have never shed the blood of the oppressors save in the field of battle, who had crowned an heroic struggle with a decisive victory over the last of the Burgundian Dukes; less happy than the Italians who had built a united nation in the heroic age of the nationalist movement; the Irish were confronted with the less enviable and less romantic task of carrying on by any means in their power an unequal conflict against modern weapons of war. The necessity may be allowed, but the consequences are plain for all to see. A tradition of violence has received a partial sanction if cloaked under the name of patriotism, and such a tradition firmly implanted by earlier rebellions and more especially by the land war will take long to eradicate. To-day the curious may see inscribed in white on the grey walls of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Signor Croce, *Italy, 1871-1915*, p. 2.

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Kilmainham Jail the words "We shall rise again." Irishmen do not regard such utterances lightly, for they know that it might be possible by an appeal to the past to divide public opinion on the question of physical force or constitutional progress. The news-boys who cry *An Phoblacht*<sup>1</sup> in Grafton Street in the same strident and aggressive tones in which the newsvendors of Paris call *L'Action Française* or *L'Emancipation Nationale* in the shadow of the Madeleine are a reminder to the sober citizens of a bourgeois state that dangerous currents still flow beneath the surface of national life.

But it were wrong to ascribe the disillusion of Ireland wholly or even in greater part to the character of the Anglo-Irish war or to the consequences of civil war. In truth, whatever the antecedents, some such disillusion was bound to pervade public opinion in the new state. That background of romantic idealism which inspired the Celtic Renaissance and clothed with heroic glamour a well-nigh forgotten past, fostered an outlook on the future far removed from the realities of political and social life in the modern world. Reaction was inevitable. Poets may indulge in eloquent ideals, but the reputation of statesmen depends on solid achievements. The romantic conception of politics dies hard, but in fact the art of government to-day is a sober, complicated, even a dull business concerned of necessity with problems of social and economic life, with the improvement of administration. The simplicity of a single idea, national independence, appealed to the imaginative poets: the complexity of modern government arouses only their protest. And to the people as a whole political issues are more comprehensible because they appear to present problems that are soluble, whereas economic and social problems frequently seem insoluble by statesmen who can exercise control only over the economy of the state they govern and not over world conditions as a whole on which that economy in the last analysis is dependent. In such circumstances it is not surprising

<sup>1</sup> *The Republic*. It is a news-sheet whose publication is periodically banned.

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that the main current of Irish literary thought has broken away from the romanticism of the Literary Movement and has adopted a more realist approach to contemporary life. But outside this literary circle romanticism is more popular than realism, perhaps because in past centuries the sufferings of the country have been so intense. When Flaubert had written in *Madame Bovary* his sordid realist picture of the provincial France he knew so well, he felt the need to turn his back on the modern world "qui le fatigue autant à reproduire qu'il le dégoûte à voir," and to dream of the vanished splendour of the ancient world, to write "de grandes choses somptueuses," of battles, of sieges, of the decadence, the cruelty and the wealth of a Carthage confronted by the challenge of barbarian hordes. As Flaubert found an outlet in *Salammbô* so Irishmen found an escape in romantic pictures of their Gaelic past. The causes which drove them to seek such an escape have mostly vanished, but the outlook remains and a romantic conception of Irish politics still appeals to popular sentiment. The call is not for a Fabian policy with its dullness and its solid achievement; it is for dramatic leadership, for personality rather than principle, with faith in oratory rather than in argument, in the picturesque rather than in the precise, in the spectacular triumph rather than in the steady advance. And so to-day we still hear the voice of that ghost of romantic Ireland which through the centuries has sat robed and crowned on the grave thereof. The sooner it is deposed the better for everyone.

## CHAPTER IX

### *The Irish Question in World Politics*

"We must understand that cosmopolitanism grows out of nationalism: if we want to extend cosmopolitanism we must first establish strongly our own nationalism."

SUN YAT SEN

*The Three Principles of the People*

"You cloud your speech with some eloquent expression of your desire to satisfy the natural aspirations of Irishmen. Rightly or wrongly, I have not the slightest wish to satisfy the natural aspirations of Ireland." Many English Conservatives and not a few Liberals envied Lord Salisbury the caustic candour of his references to Irishmen and their politics, but calculated that indulgence in such language, however pleasant, was likely to exact too heavy an electoral price. Not everyone could count on an immunity such as that enjoyed by the head of the House of Cecil. But it would be wrong to suppose, as is so often imagined in Ireland, that electoral calculation was the only cause of England's remarkable preoccupation with Ireland in the last decades of the Union. It is true that such considerations induced a certain artificiality in Parliamentary debate, but while so negative an influence might intensify, yet it could not have created, so deep an interest. If the two English parties had resolutely determined to ignore the Irish demands; if they had been able to reach agreement on the measure of redress to be afforded to Irish grievances; if, as Gladstone once wished, they had declined to compete for the Irish vote; then it is very likely that the whole question of



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Anglo-Irish relations and of the Repeal of the Union could have been kept in the background perhaps right up to the war. Sitting on the safety valve in this way might well have led to an explosion, but whether the explosion would have been as violent, as was in fact the case, is doubtful. In other words the probability is that the English parties by imposing a firm yet benevolent despotism on Ireland, by carefully relegating the Irish Question to the background could have both postponed and shortened the day of reckoning. Why did not the danger of party-competition for the Irish vote, of focussing the attention of the world on Irish grievances, produce such a concerted policy? The answer is not that the bitterness of party strife made agreement impossible, but that the conscience of many Englishmen was too profoundly disturbed to allow the issue to be evaded in this way. Like Lord Salisbury they cared little about "the natural aspirations of Irishmen," but they cared a great deal about the reputation of English government.

Home Rule failed in 1886, but Gladstone's campaign for Irish self-government stirred the English conscience as it had been stirred nine years earlier by the Midlothian campaign on behalf of the Balkan Christians; and in both instances the immediate end was not accomplished, but in both instances too, Englishmen were made to doubt the wisdom and still more the existence of any moral justification for a traditional policy. The demand for clearing the Turk "bag and baggage from the province he has desolated and profaned" like the policy of Home Rule, appealed not primarily to the self-interest but to the conscience of Englishmen. And though the majority of the electorate were in neither case converted to the Gladstonian view, yet the two campaigns created an acute awareness of England's moral responsibilities. In turn this made a "deal" between the two parties for the settlement of Ireland impossible and in so doing placed in the forefront an issue which became the concern not merely of the two

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peoples most directly concerned, but also of enlightened opinion throughout the world. Gladstone had brought a European mind to the solution of the problem of Anglo-Irish relations and though his policy failed he did succeed in bringing into relief the wider significance of the Irish Question.

In appearance the problem of Anglo-Irish relations was a local issue. In reality, because its repercussions were of international consequence, it possessed a direct interest both to the peoples of Europe and of the New World. That interest was accentuated by the coming of the first World War. Ireland was a pawn in the game of international politics; not a very important one it is true, but still not one to be altogether overlooked. Bismarck, the Kaiser, Lenin all at different times and with different motives considered how Irish discontent might be turned to advantage. To the enemies of England the unsolved Irish Question was an opportunity, to her friends, to both France and the United States it was an unwelcome embarrassment.

Lord Salisbury was the last champion of "splendid isolation"; after the turn of the century his successors, fully conscious that England's isolation was more apparent than her splendour, hastened to find in Japan an ally in the Far East and in France a friend nearer home. Such support was necessary in an age of power politics, not the less so because, what Lord Dufferin reported from Paris in 1896, "I am afraid I can only describe the sentiments of French people of all classes towards us that of unmitigated and bitter dislike,"<sup>1</sup> would have found an echo in most of the capitals of Europe. The Irish Question, a running sore, had played no small part in accentuating an unpopularity, due largely to irritation at the then impregnable security afforded to Britain by her naval supremacy. There was, however, genuine sympathy for Ireland as well, though it was sympathy with her social distress more often than with her nationalist aspirations.

<sup>1</sup> Vide André Maurois, *King Edward and His Times*, p. 179.

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"Ireland," said Metternich in the middle years of the nineteenth century, "is passing forth. It is wending its way to the North American States . . . to ask for an empty space of ground."<sup>1</sup> The great exodus that succeeded the Famine years aroused the sympathy of all Europe. Conservative nationalists as Cavour and Gioberti, revolutionary nationalists as Mazzini and Kossuth, statesmen as sober as Guizot, reactionaries as implacable as Metternich—all were stirred to pity or to reproach at the sight of the thousands of exiles crossing the Atlantic. They understood, too, what Englishmen as a whole did not, that sooner or later the descendants of these exiles would demand retribution. The Fenians found their followers, the Land League its resources, the Republic its champions among the Irish colonists in the New World. Even a brief record of American reactions to British policy in Ireland in the World War reveals the remarkable dependence of American policy on the course of events in Ireland.

### AMERICAN REACTIONS TO THE IRISH QUESTION, 1914-1921

In the United Kingdom people, even those in authority, for long remained unaware of the extent to which American policy in the years immediately preceding and during the World War was influenced by the reactions of American opinion to the successive phases of English policy in Ireland. Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, the English Ambassador in Washington, time and again warned his Government as to the extreme sensitiveness of American opinion on the Irish Question. On May 20, 1915, when the Allies, despairing of an early peace, were beginning to look more anxiously across the Atlantic in the hope that their reserves of material and man-power might be replenished by American collaboration on the democratic side, Sir Cecil emphasized in a letter from Washington,

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in G. F. H. Berkeley, 1921, *Italy in the Making*, vol. II, p. 164.

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"the very great importance" of avoiding any action in Ireland which "might arouse a strong anti-British sentiment here."<sup>1</sup>

In fact anti-British sentiment was stirred to fever-heat a year later when the leaders of the Easter Rising were shot. "It is most unfortunate," wrote Sir Cecil, "that it has been found necessary to execute the rebels."<sup>2</sup> The executions, he felt, made it hopeless to count on American help or even on American sympathy so much was he impressed by the consequent change in American opinion towards England. The settlement of the Home Rule Question might have a beneficial effect, but henceforward the Ambassador despaired of conciliating the Irish-Americans. "Our cause among the Irish here," he wrote, "is a lost one. They have blood in their eyes when they look our way."

Mr. Lloyd George was conscious of the danger of alienating American opinion at such a moment. As a politician he appreciated the influence of the Irish-American vote on the result of the 1916 Presidential election, and as a statesman determined to win the war at all costs, he realized the imperative need of counteracting the growth of anti-British feeling in the States. His task was rendered far easier by the evidence of German brutality afforded by the submarine campaign in the Atlantic. The Balfour mission was tangible proof of his determination to conciliate American opinion. "It is sad to me," said Lord Balfour to the American Ambassador just before leaving on his mission in 1917, "that we are so unpopular, so much more unpopular than the French in your country? Why is it? The old school books?" Mr. Page doubted the influence of the school books.

"Certainly," he said, "their influence is not the main cause. It is the organized Irish. Then it's the effect of the very fact that the Irish Question is not settled. You've had that problem

<sup>1</sup> *Letters and Friendships of Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, A Record*. Edited by Stephen Gwynn, vol. II, p. 273.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of May 20, 1916.

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at your very door for three hundred years. What is the matter that you don't solve it?"

"Yes, yes," replied Mr. Balfour in plaintive tones,<sup>1</sup> but he had no positive suggestion, for indeed his own policy had been tried and failed more than a dozen years before. The wheel had come in full circle. At the most critical moment of a war to prevent the German domination of Europe the armed support of the United States was delayed until the President could reassure the American people as to the direction of English policy in Ireland.

One of the notable products of the Balfour Mission was the communication of a request from President Wilson that Great Britain should take some decisive step to settle the Irish Question. "The President," declared this message to the Ambassador, "wishes that when next you meet the Prime Minister you would explain to him that only one question now appears to stand in the way of perfect co-operation with Great Britain. All Americans who are not immediately connected with Germany by blood ties find their one difficulty in the failure of Great Britain so far to establish a satisfactory form of self-government in Ireland. In the recent debates in Congress on the War Resolution this sentiment was especially manifest. . . . If the American people were once convinced that there was a likelihood that the Irish Question would soon be settled great enthusiasm would result and it would strengthen the co-operation which we are now about to organize between the United States and Great Britain."<sup>2</sup> Mr. Lloyd George had little interest in history, and so perhaps never reflected on the improvidence of English statesmanship whose solution for Irish over-population in the nineteenth century was the emigration to the New World of a people who were unreconciled to its rule in the Old—a people whose descendants exercising a decisive influence on American policy were capable of

<sup>1</sup> Hendrick, *Life and Letters of Walter H. Page*, vol. II, p. 255 seq.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.

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exactng retribution by making American assistance in war dependent on a solution of the Irish Question.<sup>1</sup> Instead of indulging in such reflections the British Prime Minister, when confronted with the American request broke out, "God knows I'm trying. Tell your President that." And then looking across the room he saw in Sir Edward Carson, his First Lord of the Admiralty, a convenient target. "Madmen—madmen—" he cried." I never saw any such task. Madmen! But the President's right. We've got to settle it and we've got to settle it now." It was a subject on which Sir Edward's idea of a settlement differed considerably from that of Mr. Lloyd George and still more from that of President Wilson.

President Wilson was the son of a Presbyterian Minister of Scottish descent. He was born in Virginia and brought up in Georgia. His political thought was founded upon an uneasy union of the missionary zeal inherited from the Covenanters and of the devotion of the Southern Democrats to popular sovereignty or self-determination.<sup>2</sup> His insistence on the principle of self-determination might have predisposed him to sympathy even with the extreme national claims of Irishmen had not an inherited mistrust of the Southern Irish caused him to look askance at their pretensions. The President impressed on the Prime Minister the need for an Irish settlement agreeable to American opinion if the United States were to enter the war on the allied side. He did not, however, himself regard Ireland as one of the nations "struggling to be free," and in the various proposals which he sponsored, the Irish were not numbered with the Poles or the Czechs or the Serbs as one of the peoples whose independence was a necessary condition of peace.

The President in fact preferred to regard the solution of the Irish Question more as a factor in home politics than as

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the opinion of Sir Cecil Spring-Rice. Gwynn, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 393.

<sup>2</sup> Vide Sir A. Zimmern, *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law*, pp. 216-17.

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an integral part of the new European settlement. His professed task at the Peace Conference was the re-arrangement of national frontiers according to the principle of self-determination. Before the President sailed for Europe in December 1918 more than a thousand Roman Catholic priests of the Diocese of New York sent him an appeal to make the principle of self-determination applicable to Ireland. A similar appeal was sent to him by wireless, after he had sailed, from a large Madison Square meeting of the Friends of Irish Freedom. To such appeals Wilson returned noncommittal replies for he was well aware that his difficulties in Europe would be greatly increased if he incurred British hostility in advance by a pronouncement in favour of Irish self-determination. At the same time his position as leader of the Democratic party which commanded the allegiance of the vast majority of Irish-Americans, rendered definite opposition to Irish claims out of the question. So he was compelled to pursue a middle course uncongenial to his autocratic temper.

The sympathy of the people of the United States for Ireland was clearly shown when on March 4, 1919, the House of Representatives passed by 261 votes to 41 the Resolution of Mr. Thomas Gallagher of Illinois which read:

That it is the earnest hope of the Congress of the United States of America that the Peace Conference now sitting at Paris and passing upon the rights of the various people will favourably consider the claims of Ireland to self-determination.

Miss Macardle in her history of the Irish Republic draws the conclusion that by this vote "the American people had instructed their President to support Ireland's claim."<sup>1</sup> Such was not entirely the case. The resolution was so worded—"the Peace Conference shall favourably consider"—as to attract

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 292. It should be observed that though the majority is large the vote is small. More than a quarter of the House abstained from voting.

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the support of all sympathizers in the House of Representatives without committing them to any explicit course of action in the future. In the circumstances only a man of definite conviction would vote against the motion since it would automatically entail the loss of Irish support at the next election, whereas the waverer would either abstain or vote for the motion. The issue is one of some significance since the acceptance of Miss Macardle's interpretation in Ireland has prompted the inevitable enquiry that if sympathy in the United States was so overwhelming as this vote suggests, why did not public opinion there insist on a hearing for the Irish case at the Peace Conference?

In 1919-1920 support for Ireland in the States was seriously weakened by divisions within the Irish-American ranks. John Devoy, leader of the Irish-American organization, the Clan na Gael, and Judge Coholan, his intimate friend and adviser, were not prepared to give unqualified support to the extreme Republican claims in Ireland. Though Devoy had taken part in the planning of the German expedition to Ireland in 1916, which is associated with Sir Roger Casement's name, he rather unexpectedly refrained from according recognition in his paper, the *Gaelic American*,<sup>1</sup> to the Irish Republic as established by the Declaration of Dáil Eireann in 1919. More serious even than these internal dissensions was Judge Coholan's denunciation of the League of Nations. President Wilson, who displayed the arrogance of a citizen of the New World in his concern for the plight of the Old, could not forgive criticism of his most cherished project for the regeneration of Europe. This conflict of opinion on the League heralded the loss of the Irish vote to the Democratic party in the 1920 elections. Yet despite internal dissensions pressure from America was persistent. On June 6, 1919, the Senate resolved with only one dissentient voice that a hearing should be given to the representatives of Ireland at the Peace Conference. In addition the Senate

<sup>1</sup> Vide Miss Macardle, op. cit., pp. 290-2.



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“expressed its sympathy with the aspirations of the Irish people for a government of their own choice.”<sup>1</sup>

The danger of an Irish appeal to the Peace Conference over the head of the British Government had attracted the attention of the British Foreign Office as soon as they came to consider the general principles of the Peace Settlement. President Wilson’s enunciation of the right of self-determination implied that the Irish claim would henceforward be placed on a new basis. Would the Peace Conference be entitled to discuss whether or no the Irish claim to self-determination was valid? Could it refuse to consider the claim and yet remain true to the spirit of the Fourteen Points? A Foreign Office paper entitled “A Memorandum prepared for the consideration of the British Government in connection with the forthcoming Peace Settlement” was drafted in the Autumn of 1918. In it the difficulty likely to confront the British Government is considered. “Efforts will doubtless be made,” reads the fifth section, “to embody provisions in the Treaty safeguarding the rights of minorities . . . and further, to interpret the doctrine of ‘self-determination’ as entitling such minorities, if they can claim to be nations, to present their case to the Peace Conference.” On both these points the memorandum recommended that as much discretion as possible should be left in the hands of the Allied Powers. “It would be clearly inadvisable,” the document continues, “to go even the smallest distance in the direction of admitting the American negroes, or the Southern Irish, or the Flemings, or Catalans to appeal to an inter-State Conference over the head of their own Government.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore the British Government should beware of encouraging a right of appeal to the Conference from Macedonians or German Bohemians lest such a course should encourage more inconvenient claims nearer home. The Conference and later the League of Nations should trust

<sup>1</sup> Quoted, *ibid.*, p. 310.

<sup>2</sup> The Memorandum is quoted in full in Zimmern, *op. cit.*, pp. 197–209.

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member states "to be true to their professions" rather than courage appeals to this international tribunal from some part their subjects. At the same time member states which allowed opaganda subversive of the government of their neighbours could be placed outside the pale of the League's membership, suggestion directed against Communists but also applicable the activities of Irish-American Republican organizations.

The calculation of this Foreign Office document, as provi-nt as it was cynical, reveals the predicament of the British overnment. There was a strong case against the enunciation d the application of the principle of national self-determina-on. It has been voiced by Mr. Robert Lansing who was for me time the adviser of President Wilson on Foreign policy d who recorded the impressions of an able, if rather con-sequential, American observer at the end of 1918. "The more think about the President's declaration as to the right of lf-determination, the more convinced I am of the danger putting such ideas into the minds of certain races. It is und to be the basis of impossible demands. What effect will have on the Irish, the Indians, the Egyptians, the nationalists ,ong the Boers? Will it not breed . . . rebellion? The phrase simply loaded with dynamite. It will raise hopes which can ver be realized. It will cost thousands of lives. In the end is bound to be discredited, to be called the dream of an ealist . . . what a calamity the phrase was ever uttered!"<sup>1</sup>

Outspoken criticism of this character did not come from e British Government. Why? It was largely because the inciple of self-determination was generally accepted as the ost hopeful basis for settlement in South Eastern and Central ,rope, but also in part because of more ephemeral nsiderations. The American President could not be rebuffed. e might be cajoled. The only statesmanlike course was, there-re, the acceptance of the principle reserving for later dis-<sup>1</sup> sion the necessarily arbitrary distinction to be drawn

<sup>1</sup> Robert Lansing, *The Peace Negotiations*, 1921, p 87.

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between those who had the right to self-determination and those who had not.

It cannot be denied that the British Government handled a thorny question with considerable skill, and thereby averted a disastrous rupture in Anglo-American relations. On President Wilson fell the onus of refusing a hearing to the Irish delegates to the Peace Conference. He received the Irish deputation in Paris on June 11, 1919, and explained that the Committee of Four had decided that no small nation should appear before it without the unanimous consent of the whole Committee. An attempt to secure French co-operation had failed earlier in the year when Mr. Sean T. O'Kelly wrote to M. Clemenceau defining the Irish claims to self-determination and urging that these claims should be heard by the Conference. As one familiar with the character of M. Clemenceau would have expected, the letter received no reply. Moreover, French opinion, though traditionally friendly to Ireland, could not regard the rising of 1916 with favour. M. Rivoallan expresses the French point of view when he writes: "Notre dilemme est aujourd'hui le même qu' en 1916: nous ne pouvions applaudir à une insurrection qui favorisait, non inconsciemment, l'ennemi que nous combattions devant Verdun, nous ne pouvions non plus refuser à l'héroïsme des insurgés notre tribut d'admiration."<sup>1</sup> France may hope for the complete independence of Ireland, but only if England is not thereby weakened.

The Irish claim was not considered at Versailles. But American sympathy for the Irish cause did not lessen, and when in March 1920 the American Senate had the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles under consideration it resolved that when self-government was attained by Ireland, "a consummation which it is hoped is at hand," then Ireland "should be promptly admitted as a member of the League of Nations."<sup>2</sup> This new evidence of American sympathy was certainly not

<sup>1</sup> *L'Irlande*, pp 197-8.

<sup>2</sup> Vide Macardle, *op. cit.*, pp. 380-1.

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without effect in England where it was understood that a discontented Ireland might seriously affect future co-operation between the United Kingdom and the United States. Continued repression could only alienate American opinion, and the ultimately successful endeavours to end the war in Ireland in 1921 acquired a sense of urgency from the character of the American reactions to Mr. Lloyd George's attempt "to break up a small body of assassins."

### EUROPEAN REACTIONS TO THE IRISH QUESTION

The influence of Anglo-Irish relations on American Foreign policy illustrates the dangerous reactions which the state of Ireland under the Union aroused in nations most friendly to England. Here was a bar to co-operation, and an ever-present potential source of estrangement. But in Europe where mistrust of England's policy and envy of her power was a commonplace, the Irish Question furnished the most perfect target for attack. From the Spain of the Armada, from the France of the Revolution, to the Germany of the Kaiser and of Hitler, Ireland seemed to offer the weakest link in the English armour. In war the existence of a neighbouring and discontented people always on the verge of rebellion afforded an invitation to intervention so tempting that not even the crowning misfortunes of the French expedition under Hoche in 1797 could dissuade Germany from lending countenance to Sir Roger Casement in 1915.<sup>1</sup>

Even though the opportunities for armed intervention were necessarily restricted by the difficulties of access in face of British naval supremacy the grievances of Ireland evoked a response in Europe due less perhaps to altruistic interest in her welfare than to the pleasure of exposing the misgovernment of "perfidious Albion." Long had the great powers of

<sup>1</sup> A sympathetic account of the Casement expedition is to be found in Miss D. Macardle's *The Irish Republic*, chapters xiii-ixv.

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Europe listened to Englishmen's eulogies of England's disinterested concern for the happiness of other peoples—of Poles, of Greeks, of Sicilians. No retort to this frequently disturbing and always moral concern was so effective as a survey of the state of Ireland after some six centuries of English rule.

Count Cavour in the middle years of the nineteenth century observed, not without regret, how the press of every nation in Europe, and writers of every political shade were united only in the venom of their attacks on Britain. For such attacks the state of Ireland afforded an opening too favourable to be neglected. In the *Argus*, a propaganda journal which Napoleon issued after the Peace of Amiens and which was written in English, the attempt to ridicule British statesmen and to represent the state of England as one of almost revolutionary chaos acquired most substance in jeers at the contrast between "the much vaunted freedom," "the didactic attitude" of English utterances on European policy and the state of impending revolution in Ireland. The target that attracted the hostile propaganda of the French Emperor was too obvious to be overlooked in more recent years. Vincenzo Gioberti, in the *Primato* in which he championed the claims of the Papacy to lead the Italian nationalist movement, whilst admitting the English people to be undoubtedly the first in the world, for the energy of its life and of its national personality, went on to speak of her "two internal ulcers," pauperism and Ireland. Ireland is to England, he remarks, in a comparison unflattering to Englishmen, as Poland is to Russia.<sup>1</sup>

Mazzimo D'Azeglio, a Piedmontese aristocrat whose rare qualities of mind and character enabled him to render memorable service both to Italian nationalism and to the House of Savoy, as Prime Minister of Piedmont during three critical years, once deplored the fact that the misfortunes of Italy under alien rule did not excite the pity of the world "as it is aroused in the case of Poland and of Ireland our sisters."

<sup>1</sup> Quoted Berkeley, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 171.

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I mean the indignation which generous minds feel against those who oppress others, and the ancient honourable compassion that is a comfort and a hope, not an insult to the oppressed." "Ireland and Poland," he said later, "the opinion, the sympathy and the wishes of the whole of civilization is with them and nowadays these feelings are powerful allies."<sup>1</sup> Empty emotional phrases, it may be said, which count for less and less as the new age of Imperialism dawns, as the catchwords of romantic nationalism lose all reality in a continent menaced once again with the threat of German military domination. In a sense that is true. For the oppressed to rely on disinterested sympathy of other nations means indulgence in dangerous daydreams. Abyssinia and Czechoslovakia taught the world a bitter lesson. Good intentions count for precisely nothing unless backed both by force and statesmanship. Worse still the easy sympathies of distant peoples lure on to a yet more final doom the victims who place reliance in them. But if such sympathy in fact proved of slight assistance to Ireland, yet its expression added to the number and the bitterness of England's enemies.

Arthur Griffith was asked in the years before the World War what was the foreign policy of Sinn Fein. "In any issue," he replied, "I find out where England stands. Ireland will be found on the other side." Whether so negative a policy was ever in the best interests of Ireland is doubtful. Certainly to-day an independent nation cannot pursue a foreign policy based on the lack of any guiding principle. But if the sympathy of Europe with a not entirely satisfied Ireland is a menace to England in a heavily-armed world, it presents also a yet more subtle danger to Ireland. To-day the small nations of Europe, Poland, Norway, Belgium, Holland are fighting for their very existence, and the fate that has overtaken them is a fate that is common to small States who have the misfortune to border on Germany. Ireland's geographical isolation is an advantage.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted Berkeley, *op. cit.*, vol. i, pp. 231-3.

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so long as her shores are sheltered from attack by British naval predominance, but the intellectual isolation of her people is a disadvantage if not equal, still of some considerable weight. Indifference to the course of events in Europe. Ignorance of the harsh realities of power politics foster the most dangerous illusions. Fissiparous forces remain unchecked by internal differences become exaggerated by long immunity from external menace. Ireland is now independent. "*Was will de Valera?*" asked the pamphlets displayed in the bookshops of Munich and Berlin in 1939. What indeed? Irishmen may not be quite sure, but the ponderous calculations of the Nazi propagandist scarcely do justice to the intricate involutions of that subtle, academic, yet astonishingly prudent mind.

No one who has studied carefully the causes of the World War of 1914-18 will be inclined to dismiss lightly the European significance of the Irish Question. As the statesmen of the Western democracies observed how the "Greater Serbia" and the "Greater Roumania" agitation, both within and without the frontiers of the Dual monarchy, threatened with dissolution the Empire of the Hapsburgs, so too the rulers of the autocracies of Central Europe saw in the discontent that simmered in India and in Ireland the heralds of the approaching disintegration of the British Empire. The Kaiser returned from King Edward's funeral convinced that England was on the verge of civil war over the future of Ulster.<sup>1</sup> A rebellious Ireland was indeed a direct incentive to the Central Powers to strike while antagonisms were most violent. The issues which are too simply described as the "Ulster Question" may seem as they seemed to Mr. Winston Churchill "inconceivably petty." Yet as he has recorded with an imaginative insight which survives even his unconcealed disgust, "the political future of Great Britain turned" in the summer of 1914 "upon the disposition of clusters of humble parishes" in Fermanagh and Tyrone. It was true; and though there was not civil war

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Spender, *op. cit.*, p. 379.

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as the Kaiser anticipated, yet in one sense the impression that was given to this impressionable ruler counted for more in deciding the destiny of Europe than the actual event itself.

The potential significance of Ireland to the prophets of ideologies is no less great than it was to the champions of power politics. As before 1914 the rulers of Germany surveyed with watchful eyes the course of Irish politics, to see what advantage there might be for exploitation in the coming conflict, so too Lenin, an exile in Geneva, working and waiting with inhuman patience for the dawn of the proletarian revolution, reflected, as Marx and Engels had done before him, on the decisive part that Ireland might play, unconsciously perhaps, but none the less effectively, in hastening the overthrow of the existing social system. The Dublin strikes of 1913, though they failed to achieve their ostensible objectives, were, as we have seen, interpreted by Lenin as marking "the end of the influence of the nationalist *bourgeoisie* over the proletariat of Ireland." All that happened in Ireland in the years that elapsed between the end of the strikes and the outbreak of the World War confirmed Lenin in his belief both that the Irish nationalist movement could be used to overthrow the capitalist régime in the British Isles and that, having served this purpose, it could be discarded without difficulty by the succeeding international-socialist government. Like the Kaiser, though for a different reason, he attached immense significance to the Ulster Question. "The English Conservatives," he wrote in March 1914<sup>1</sup>, "led by that Black Hundred Landlord, that Purishkevich, i.e. Carson, have raised a frightful howl against Irish autonomy. Lord Carson has threatened to rise in rebellion and organized armed gangs of Black Hundreds for this purpose." Carson's object is to scare the Liberals. If the latter appealed to the proletariat then all would have been well. But "the Liberals in England, the lackeys of

<sup>1</sup> "The English Liberals and Ireland," *Collected Works*, vol. xvii.



the money-bags are capable only of cringing before the Carsons."<sup>1</sup> Mr. Asquith's indecisive moderation could have no attraction for the most able of Marx's disciples. Lenin consoled himself with the thought that Liberal inaction would widen the gulf between this *bourgeois* party and the proletariat.

The Curragh mutiny, an event of obvious significance in English constitutional history since it reopened the question of Parliamentary control over the army, encouraged his hope since it threatened the sovereignty of Parliament and in so doing weakened the strongest bulwark against violence. If parliamentary government broke down, then the working class, throwing off their reliance on constitutional reform would be easily persuaded to seek amelioration of their conditions by violence. Such were Lenin's too hasty reactions to the Curragh mutiny.

"The significance of this revolt of the landlords," he wrote "against the 'all-powerful' (as the Liberal blockheads . . . have said a million times) English Parliament is extraordinarily great. March 21, 1914, will mark a world historical turning-point when the noble landlords of England, smashing the English constitution and English law to atoms, gave an excellent lesson in class struggle.

"The lesson emerged from the possibility of blunting the antagonisms between the proletariat and the *bourgeoisie* of England by means of the half-hearted, hypocritical, sickening reformist policy of the Liberals. This lesson will not be lost upon the English labour movement; the working class will, now very quickly shake off its philistine faith in the scrap of paper that is called . . . the English constitution.

"After their long sleep since the end of the eighteenth century, after the Chartist Movement, 1830-40, the English proletariat has awakened once again. The constitutional crisis

<sup>1</sup> *A Reactionary Landlord.*

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of 1914 is one of the most important stages in the history of this awakening."<sup>1</sup>

Lenin was right in sensing the disturbing quality of the threat to English constitutional government implicit in the "revolt of the revolutionaries from the Right," but he overlooked, because he underestimated the intensity, even the ruthlessness of national sentiment, the consequences of such a precedent in Ireland. In England the reckless affront of the Ulster Unionists to constitutional tradition has had less marked reactions than might reasonably have been anticipated. In Ireland it has had greater. The interest of Lenin's deductions however, lies not in the accuracy of his interpretation so much as in the general attitude to Anglo-Irish relations which it displays. It is fascinating, if disturbing, to follow the reactions of this single-minded fanatic to the various phases of the Irish Question and to read the violent yet dispassionate invective which lends colour to an analysis formed in exile whilst the founder of the new Russia gazed on the activities of a social order whose destruction was the goal of all his efforts.

Lenin's interpretation of the Irish Question was essentially as mistaken as the Kaiser's anticipation of civil war in England. In both instances their conclusions were coloured by their hopes. But that is not to say that their impressions have no lasting importance. Far from it, for they emphasized, what needs very much to be emphasized in Ireland to-day, that whatever the wishes of her people Ireland cannot live detached from continental politics and political movements. Her geographical position, neighbouring a Great Power, makes that in the long run impossible.

Political isolation which ultimately means intellectual isolation is in any event for that reason undesirable. A people cannot live to itself alone without losing all moral claim to its independence. Mazzini understood well that a nation, if it is to fulfil its duty, must endeavour to contribute to the welfare

<sup>1</sup> "The Constitutional Crisis in England," *Collected Works*, vol. xvii.

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of humanity as a whole. A pious aversion to all things foreign, from American films to English games, may be regarded as the hall-mark of true patriotism without doing much harm, but there is some danger that the attitude which condemns irrespective of merit the contribution of other nations in trivial things may lead to the overlooking of their contribution in great things, will shut itself off from the culture and tradition of Europe, from the great heritage of civilization to which all nations have contributed in greater or lesser degree, and which Ireland can enjoy and increase only by playing her part as she played it in the dark ages of Christendom, fully and frankly as one of the great community of nations which people the world. "The nation," said Mazzini, "is a being with a definite duty." "The question of the nationalities was," he wrote, "and is for me and should be for all of us, a very different matter from a mere tribute due to our rights or to our local pride: it should be the sharing out of European work. . . ."

These dangers of intellectual detachment are reinforced by the dangers of political detachment. In a world of power politics as in a world of warring ideologies a small country like Ireland is looked upon as no more than a pawn on the European chess-board. A discontented country may have its uses, as the Kaiser thought in 1914—and as Hitler thought, so Herr Rauschning tells us, in 1933 when he spoke of the lesson to be learnt from the Casement expedition—as a vantage ground for attack on England, or the revolutionary nationalist temper of its people may serve to further the world-wide designs of the Communist International as Marx and Lenin believed. At times the possibility of the successful achievement of such designs may appear remote, at times as today the prospect of invasion seems very close. In either event the temptation to use Ireland to serve other interests than her own national interests remains as strong as ever. The menace from Communist designs may have diminished; the greater

<sup>1</sup> *Hitler Speaks*, p. 79.

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danger may appear to come from a right which would perhaps welcome a convenient opportunity to use the indiscretions of the Left to build up a quasi-Fascist state; but in any case the existence of all such dangers may best be counteracted by a clear and well-defined national policy which by removing uncertainties would eradicate the temptation to outside intervention.

Some forty years ago Lord Salisbury noted as the dominant characteristic of the world of his day that the great nations were becoming stronger and the small nations becoming weaker. Obviously true then in a heavily-armed Europe, it is no less true in the world to-day. For a brief decade the League of Nations afforded both a guarantee to the smaller states of their independence and, no less important, a voice in deciding the destiny of Europe. The eclipse of international law and the failure of this international tribunal was a loss more keenly felt by the small than by the great Powers, for it is a loss alike to their security and to their influence. The renewed aggression of Germany against her weaker neighbours makes the temptation to withdraw into complete isolation very great, and yet to yield to it were to abandon the foremost duties of a nation to the association of nations of which all states are members. In small states alone may a public opinion be formed, freed from the considerations of power politics and interested not in the prestige but only in the welfare of nations. The big battalions dominate the world but they will fail because they cannot claim the moral allegiance of mankind.

\* The spectacle of Irishmen brooding over the wrongs of centuries has been evoked so often to illustrate so many arguments that the world has come to believe that virtually every Irishman has a distinct, though maybe distorted, picture of the history of his island. Nothing could be further removed from the truth. In Ireland there is a lamentable ignorance of Irish history, deepened by a complete failure to realize the

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true character of Ireland's contribution to Europe and Europe's contribution to Ireland. A knowledge of isolated events there may be, but that cannot compensate for an ignorance of history. Stories of heroism and of outrage, of sacrifice, of "battles long ago" mingle in the minds of most Irishmen with bitter tales of destruction, of confiscation, of famine. The theme, with but rare exceptions, is resistance to the invaders and to the rule of an alien people. It is partly because Ireland's political life has been dominated by this one question since the Danish invasion a thousand years ago that Irishmen are content that history should be regarded merely as a record of the sensational or of the picturesque. But the failure to see history in perspective must also be attributed in part to a curious national reluctance to acknowledge the changes that time has wrought. In the minds of Irishmen the events of many centuries ago stand out in clear relief against a background shadowy, nebulous, indeterminate. They are identified with no period, they are not related to the contemporary history of Europe. They possess an "ageless" quality, as though the passing of centuries were indeed but an illusion in the mind of man. So it is that the heroes of bygone struggles live on in the memory of succeeding generations, like the figures of an El Greco canvas painted in rather stiffly amid a dull ashen monotony of colour. So it is also that Irish history has remained for many Irishmen no more than a series of incidents, unco-ordinated by a logical sequence of cause and effect, unsubstantiated by evidence of economic or social conditions, entirely dissociated from the events of the outside world.<sup>1</sup> It has been argued that the accumulation of detail essential to the reconstruction of an historical background would detract from the picturesque personal quality of such events. But such a view is surely mistaken. Additions to historical knowledge can only illuminate what has hitherto been obscure, can only help to determine the true relation between causes and

<sup>1</sup> Irish history alone is now taught in national schools, and it is taught in complete isolation from its European context.

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consequences, between personalities and events, between what is exclusively national and what is international, and unfold a wider view of Ireland's historical development. Our understanding of the present is conditioned by our knowledge of the past; and if that knowledge is casual rather than complete then the loss is one that affects our outlook on the future no less than our judgment of the past.

Such reflections are aroused frequently enough when one reads of the reactions of European observers to various phases of Irish history. All too frequently their comments instil a belief that the outside world is far more conscious of the potential significance of the historical process in Ireland than are Irishmen themselves. This is to be deplored. The history of Ireland is part of the history of Europe. Its thought, its development is inextricably associated with the great European tradition. It was John Stuart Mill who observed that anyone who reflected on the constitution of society in England and in Ireland, with any sufficient knowledge of the states of society which exist elsewhere, would be driven, however unwillingly, to the conclusion that "there is probably no other nation of the civilized world, which, if the task of governing Ireland had happened to devolve on it, would not have shown itself more capable of that work than England has done."<sup>1</sup> The reasons which Mill adduced are not all convincing, but it is difficult to disagree when he writes "there is no other civilized nation which is so far apart from Ireland in the character of its history as England . . . and none therefore which, if it applies to Ireland the modes of thinking and maxims of government which have grown up within itself is so certain to go wrong." Mill's verdict as a whole may be disputed, but none can deny that it possesses one important element of the truth. Ireland, geographically isolated from Europe has a distinctive political outlook which makes the comprehension of the Irish Question peculiarly difficult to outside observers.

<sup>1</sup> J. S. Mill, *England and Ireland*, 1868.

*Some Reflections on the Relative  
Significance of Economic and Political  
Forces in the Development of  
Anglo-Irish Relations*

"Man is the slave neither of his race, nor his language, nor his religion. . . . That moral consciousness which we call a nation is created by a great assemblage of men with warm hearts and healthy minds: and as long as this moral consciousness can prove its strength by the sacrifices demanded from the individual for the benefit of the community, it is justifiable and has the right to exist."

E. RENAN, *What is a Nation?*

IN writing of the Irish Question one is always conscious of the fact that the end is not yet. The verdict of historians who too hastily assumed that the Treaty of 1921 liquidated all outstanding differences between England and Ireland has already been falsified by events. It is true that 1921 marked the ending of an age, but that age left its legacies, many of them bitter legacies, which were destined to influence the future. In history there are no endings and no beginnings. In 1921 Ireland stood on the threshold of a new age, Anglo-Irish relations entered a new phase, but the past remained to encourage, to influence, and to warn.

This absence of finality prevents the historian from saying

with certainty that one interpretation of history is true and that another is false. All he can do is to suggest that one interpretation explains the course of events more satisfactorily, that it throws more light upon the actions of men and peoples, than another. Further he cannot go. Some historians, wrote Mr. H. A. L. Fisher,<sup>1</sup> have been fortunate enough to detect a guiding principle which has governed the course of history, but his own study of the growth of European civilization only confirmed in him a spirit of historical agnosticism. An introductory political analysis of Anglo-Irish relations such as is attempted in this book fosters a similar scepticism. There is no ultimate, final or predestined solution of Anglo-Irish relations; there is only a continuous conflict of forces, whose direction and strength are always changing. What appears final to-day may well be refuted by the events of to-morrow. All one can detect are certain tendencies which appear predominant at a certain time and whose analysis both by adding to our knowledge of the past and by assisting our judgment of the future, is not without value.

In this book, Irish history and Anglo-Irish relations have been viewed in a European context. This approach throws light not merely upon certain forces in Irish history, but also upon the nature of political and social movements which have found expression in Ireland as in many European countries. The geographical isolation of Ireland, its somewhat distinctive history lend particular interest to an analysis of the reactions of these movements upon her history.

Two principal interpretations of nineteenth-century Irish history have been considered in this book, the one economic and the other predominantly political. The economic or Marxist interpretation, assuming that the class struggle alone is fundamental, sees in the land question the only form of the social question in nineteenth-century Ireland. It was the only form because there was no middle class. The land question

<sup>1</sup> In the introduction to his *History of Europe*.



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was therefore decisive; but so long as the ascendancy landlords remained in control, the issue was clouded by considerations of a political, religious, or national character. The 1903 solution of the land question which converted the tenant farmers into peasant proprietors brought the fundamental conflict between the proletariat and the *bourgeoisie* into the foreground. By 1913 Lenin, observing the rapid growth of an Irish middle-class, singles out this class for especial condemnation. But if the economic interpretation is correct, the emergence of a *bourgeoisie* should have heralded the beginning of a decisive class-struggle for power in Ireland. No such struggle has in fact been joined. On the contrary the 1916 rising provided irrefutable evidence of co-operation between the prospective protagonists. This fact alone would make one hesitant to accept this interpretation of Irish history.

The political interpretation is familiar. It rests upon the assumption that the demand for national independence was fundamental, that good government was in fact no substitute for national government. It is accepted, at times, rather uncritically, and the chief interest in the observations of European visitors to Ireland, of Cavour, of Mazzini, and of de Beaumont in the early years of Queen Victoria's reign lies in their pre-occupation with this question. To English statesmen, who were interested not in political rights, but in political expediency, the question appeared in a more practical form. At times they were directly confronted with its economic aspect, but more normally they were concerned with a predominantly political issue. In 1886 Gladstone attempted, by associating land reform with home rule, to solve both problems at once. But essentially, with the possible exception of Mr. Balfour, English statesmen regarded the Irish question as a problem in politics. The then unchallenged supremacy of British sea-power averted the intrusion of strategic considerations, and thereby allowed this problem to be considered solely on its merits.

## Conclusion

The accentuation of Ulster opposition to home rule after 1886 emphasized the predominantly political character of the problem to be solved, and it has survived to this day to test the statesmanship of Irishmen in Dublin and Belfast.

On the whole the political interpretation is by far the more satisfying and the evidence that is to be derived from European analogies serves to confirm a belief in its essential validity. But the economic interpretation merits consideration because, though political forces were predominant, they were not, and are not, the only forces at work. To say that the economic motive force was subordinate is not to say that it was negligible and therefore deserving of the neglect it has received at the hands of most Irish historians.

The predominance of the political motive force in the period under consideration did not lead to a great fertility in political ideas in the new Ireland.<sup>1</sup> Lack of contact with the problems of other peoples "struggling to be free" was chiefly responsible for this deficiency. In the later years of the nineteenth century Ireland was intellectually detached from Europe to a degree never surpassed in her history. The consequence is seen both in the somewhat exclusive character of the post-Treaty nationalism and in a certain rigidity of approach to the Ulster Question. Lord Acton, who if not the wisest, has at least good claim to be regarded as the most learned Englishman of his generation, maintained that the combination of different nations in a State was as necessary a condition of civilized life as the combination of men in society. In most of the states of central and south-eastern Europe the State must in fact be a "cauldron in which the fusion of different races takes place," if they are to survive. But Ireland till recently free from external menace has not been confronted with the problem in an urgent form. "Where political and national boundaries coincide," wrote Lord Acton, "society ceases to advance, and a nation relapses to a condition corresponding to that of men

<sup>1</sup> Cf. my book *The Irish Free State; Its Government and Politics*, chapter xvi.

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who renounce intercourse with their fellow men.”<sup>1</sup> The verdict is extreme, but it affords a not altogether unfitting corrective to a nationalism which tends to emphasize the ideal of the exclusive nation state.

The problem of partition is the outstanding political problem which confronts contemporary Ireland. The failure to find a solution is due in the main to emotional antipathies which would not be removed by a purely political solution. On both sides of the border there is a rigidity of outlook which renders any prospect of compromise even in the face of external danger very remote. In the last analysis this aversion to compromise may be attributed to a deficiency in political ideas. Despite the intensity of national feeling Ireland has made no new or distinctive contribution to the philosophy of nationalism. The principle of national self-determination is accepted as the fundamental political concept of the age, but the theory of nationalism has not been developed or enriched in any marked degree by Irish writers.

In Ireland the unitary concept of the State is accepted as the model. No serious thought is given to conceptions other than that of the nation-state. The fact that in a United Ireland state and nation would not coincide is generally accepted as a necessary evil. Yet to the Swiss as to Lord Acton the fusion of nationalities in a single state is regarded as a positive good. The Swiss State, in the words of Max Huber,<sup>2</sup> is composed of two essential elements—the *democratic principle*, the idea of the peoples state, and the idea of the *political nation* supreme over nationalities. Intolerance in culture is fundamentally foreign to that conception. The solution of the outstanding political problem which confronts the Ireland of to-day appears dependent upon the acceptance of cultural tolerance, a virtue whose adoption it is easy to recommend but difficult to effect. For there is at the least a superficial conflict between cultural tolerance and

<sup>1</sup> *Essay on Nationality*, 1862.

<sup>2</sup> *The Swiss Concept of the State*.

### *Conclusion*

a strong, self-conscious national sentiment determined to inspire coming generations by a revival of the glories of an historic past. But Irish nationalism has shown so much good sense, has displayed so constructive a spirit in the hour of its triumph, that even here a final victory may yet be won.

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